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LIBERAL THEOLOGY IN THE AGE OF EQUALITY: TOCQUEVILLE AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON FAITH, FREEDOM, AND THE HUMAN SOUL

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by

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LIBERAL THEOLOGY IN THE AGE OF EQUALITY: TOCQUEVILLE AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT ON FAITH, FREEDOM, AND THE HUMAN SOUL

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The increasing importance of religious and moral issues in American politics makes salient once again the question of the relationship between religion and democracy. The United States is in the midst of a debate pitting secularists and those who adapt their faith to progressive outlooks against conservatives who see a need to ground liberal-democracy in something Biblical. Taking up this debate, I argue that the viewpoints of both secular progressives and religious conservatives suffer from key oversights. While the former fail to notice that their commitment to toleration rests on certain absolute claims, the latter overlook the extent to which religion has been transformed and liberalized. Seeking a more nuanced version of this debate, I compare

the Enlightenment's case for toleration to Tocqueville's claim that democracy requires religion for moral support. Examining Locke and Spinoza, I argue that the Enlightenment sought to achieve freedom, prosperity, and a rich cultural and intellectual life through the weakening or liberalization of religious belief. I then turn to Tocqueville's friendly critique of the Enlightenment and try to elucidate his solution for preserving, in times of liberalism and equality, the great human devotions which he saw as inextricably linked to religion. I conclude that that by describing a civil religion capacious enough to permit tolerance but substantive enough to encourage real devotion, Tocqueville gives us a kind of moderate politics seldom found in today's debates.

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Chapter 1: Religion, Democracy, and the Collapse of Enlightenment Rationalism

"The philosophers of the eighteenth century explained the gradual weakening of beliefs in an altogether simple fashion. Religious zeal, they said, will be extinguished as freedom and enlightenment increase. It is unfortunate that the facts do not accord with this theory."
-Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 282.[1]

Tocqueville's words from 1835 may now strike us as though they could have been uttered by an observer of the contemporary political scene. In our own day as in Tocqueville's, some of the most influential schools of thought have often considered religion, at least as a politically influential force, as something which the assorted powers of modernity are all but certain to sweep away.[2] As recent events would seem to testify, however, religion itself has been showing signs of refusing to cooperate with these plans. More than a century and a half after Tocqueville wrote, the political importance of God has returned to the attention of Americans. The attacks of September 11th, the rise of various kinds of fundamentalism around the world, the increasing strength put on display by religious voters in recent US elections, and the renewed attention given to issues of morality, values, and church-state relations in state legislatures and before the Supreme Court, all seem to indicate at the very least that religion has refused to be gently placed into a quiet grave. Liberalism and modernity, it appears, have not been entirely

[1] Unless otherwise noted, all references to Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* throughout this dissertation are from Tocqueville 2000.
[2] For a lucid and helpful examination of some of these trends as applied to political science, see Wald and Wilcox (2006).

successful in marginalizing religious concerns, and it looks as though the relationship between democracy and faith will remain a crucial issue for some time to come.

Even as liberalism today enjoys unprecedented political strength, it has begun to confront a new set of challenges rooted in a revival of religious feeling. The rise of various fundamentalist movements outside the West has appeared to many observers as a sign of increasing discontent with liberalism's secular and rationalist roots,[3] but more alarming is the way in which more restrained and nuanced versions of those same objections have found a friendly hearing within the very heart of the democratic world itself. In the United States, where rates of church attendance and belief in God remain high, a dissatisfaction on the Right with the perceived dominance of a purely secular version of liberalism has given religion a political role which is perhaps new in American history.[4] Recent attempts in American politics to place greater emphasis on moral issues—to ban same sex marriage, to restrict abortion, to promote school prayer, and to teach 'intelligent design'—all seem intended to fill a perceived spiritual void in a society which, in the opinion of many, has left God behind. At the same time, however, an equal and opposite reaction on the Left has engendered vociferous opposition to precisely these sentiments, and the resulting battles which have occurred over the last several decades have left indelible marks on the current political climate.

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[3] Kepel (1994), for example, has argued that what drives these reactionary movements—which are by no means limited to the Islamic world—is not primarily an allegiance to tradition but an opposition to the commercial way of life of the liberal West as something licentious and corrupting.

[4] For the argument that America is experiencing a Fourth Great Awakening, see Fogel 2000. Himmelfarb (1999) argues that the politicized religious feeling which is present in the United States today is rooted in a sense, unprecedented in American history, that religion is under siege from a secular culture which is gradually threatening to eclipse it.

What is perhaps most significant and troubling about this kind of political conflict is that, by giving renewed importance to some very old questions, it has raised issues which strike at the heart of liberalism's original theoretical foundations. Contemporary liberal-democracy, a regime characterized by religious toleration, freedom of speech and thought, and a commitment to human rights and economic growth, is the ultimate result of an Enlightenment project which attempted to subvert and replace a previous political order characterized by widespread religious belief. The construction of the modern nation-state which could provide security for its citizens, the creation of a free-market economy which could make people more comfortable and raise the overall standard of living, the progress of modern science and the development of technology, and the establishment of a political order characterized by limited government, toleration, and individual freedom, were all supposed to free human beings from the kind of religious passions that tore Europe apart in the seventeenth century. At the present time, however, Enlightenment rationalism is roundly rejected across the political spectrum. On the Right, friendly critics of liberalism have begun to question whether the great material achievements of modern civilization have not been accompanied by a profound intellectual, spiritual, and moral void, and they have forcefully argued that, as a remedy, it is now necessary to place some version of Biblical faith at the center of modern politics. On the Left, on the other hand, leading authors who remain similarly loyal to our regime have embraced the radically skeptical outlook known as anti-foundationalism. Rejecting all claims to truth as at best groundless and at worst as masks for power,

postmodern thinkers have attacked the Enlightenment's assertions about reason and human nature as both untenable and politically suspect.[5]

The debate between these two camps appears to suggest that democracy's current position of unprecedented political strength may hide a disturbing theoretical weakness, for while there is a broad consensus in the West that liberalism is desirable, there is almost no agreement as to why.[6] The current political climate seems to be made up of two competing versions of liberalism, both of which seek to remain loyal to what the Enlightenment created all the while rejecting the original theoretical arguments which it used to justify that creation. The contest between them therefore compels us to confront the key question of how—if at all—modern democracy can be reconceived if its original basis is jettisoned or altered. How can religious revivalists on the Right remain loyal to liberalism while attacking its underlying thought as productive of a spiritual and intellectual decline, and how can they expect to re-constitute it around the Bible—a book whose friendliness to liberal-democracy is at least open to question? And how can anti-foundationalists on the Left remain so moralistic about the likes of equality and human rights while simultaneously asserting that liberalism cannot ground itself in anything other than prevailing cultural sentiments?

To appreciate the depth of the problem that faces us, it will be helpful to begin with an examination of the troubling problems that have arisen in the wake of the apparent collapse of modern rationalism. In this chapter and the next, I attempt to

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[5] See the accounts in Ceaser 2006 and Owen 2001, both of which are discussed below.

[6] This issue is not trivial, for the long-term health of any regime requires not just common agreement but also the kind of internal self-confidence which can move citizens to a zealous defense of their country.

analyze the two most prominent visions of post-Enlightenment liberalism, beginning with their popular manifestations. I briefly survey some of the key electoral and demographic divisions over religious questions which have arisen in America over the past several decades, and I argue that the stark electoral cleavage between secular progressives and religious conservatives should actually be regarded as a deeper disagreement about the meaning and the foundations of liberal-democracy. Having embraced postmodern historicism, the progressive Left seeks to preserve liberal tolerance without linking it to the Enlightenment's claims about reason or human nature. The religious Right, on the other hand, faults the Enlightenment's hedonistic materialism for creating a society in which moral virtue, civic dedication, and intellectual greatness are increasingly becoming absent, and it looks for a popular religious revival to provide the moral restraints which it believes are needed in order to safeguard liberal-democratic freedom and protect an imperiled high culture. Even as they come to sight at the level of common arguments and popular polemics, however, these competing versions of liberalism each seem to be plagued by key problems and tensions. For while the postmodern Left fails to notice the extent of its own deep-seated moral attachment to democratic principles and is thus not as free from absolutism as it supposes, the religious Right appears similarly unaware of the degree to which religion today has been shaped by the same liberal outlook which it regards as inherently unstable.

To gain a greater appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of the arguments of both sides in this debate, and to judge whether the tensions which I begin to outline in chapter one are insuperable, I turn in chapter two to an examination of some

contemporary thinkers who have tried to present these competing versions of liberalism in theoretically consistent forms. Looking first at the work of Peter Augustine Lawler, Richard John Neuhaus, and Robert P. Kraynak, I explain the religious Right's criticism of the Enlightenment, which centers around the claim that liberalism's originators accepted an atheistic, materialistic, and relativistic view of human nature, and that they furthermore sought to spread that view to the general public. These conservative thinkers therefore fault the Enlightenment for engineering a society in which moral restraints are largely absent, in which human beings no longer experience the pull of devotion to country, family, or community, and, moreover, in which great intellectual and spiritual achievements have become increasingly rare. And yet, there is also a tendency among some of these thinkers to look to Christianity in an effort to discover supports for exactly those liberal principles which they also profess to find so troubling, and so, as I will argue, their writings may owe more than they suspect to the moral and theological reforms which the Enlightenment carried out. After this, in the second half of chapter two, I will turn to a brief examination of what may well be the most far-reaching attempt to re-conceive of liberal-democracy on postmodern premises: John Rawls' *Political Liberalism*. Rawls attempts to design the blueprints for a polity which rests on no philosophical foundations, which therefore includes numerous incommensurable worldviews, but in which key liberal freedoms nevertheless remain secure. From his account, however, it is not quite clear whether the disagreement that characterizes liberal politics is really as deep as he supposes, and I close this chapter by arguing that his work contains deep tensions because it fails sufficiently to acknowledge that today's

democracies are characterized by a deep-seated moral uniformity—a uniformity which he himself is often forced to acknowledge and which he at one point explicitly associates with the thought of John Locke.

These spokesmen for both the Left and the Right, I therefore argue, display a common tendency to remain deeply attached to the Enlightenment even while criticizing it. Taken together, their failures reveal the need we face to articulate a substantive defense of liberal principles, and I therefore turn in chapters 3 and 4 to an examination of those theological and cultural foundations for liberalism which the Enlightenment sought to lay. In chapter 3, I examine the way in which Locke anchored his teaching about toleration in a new, "reasonable" version of Christianity—a version of Christianity which de-emphasized the New Testament's teaching on justification by faith as well as Jesus' calls for acts of extreme self-abnegation. By effectively removing from the Bible those all-demanding and self-sacrificial virtues which he saw as linked to persecution and intolerance, Locke sought to bring Christianity more into line with the rational pursuit of temporal happiness. His revised New Testament therefore serves as a source for social harmony by promulgating a universal ethic about charity and good works, and, in his analysis, it can provide an effective civil religion for a liberal polity precisely because its teaching about rewards and punishments in another life is meant to appeal not primarily to an instinct for devotion or self-overcoming, but instead to the inescapable desire for the pursuit of happiness which all human beings feel.

But the fact that Locke believes it necessary for philosophy or political science to endorse a civil religion, and thus also to lend its support to claims of revelation, opens his

thought up, ironically, to the same criticism which is currently leveled against the Enlightenment by today's religious revivalists. For by doing this, Locke's philosophy acts as the servant of society, and this same tendency also leads it to transform itself into the modern, technologically driven scientific enterprise which, far from making any claim to possess an exalted status or to represent the *summum bonum*, aims instead to foster the widespread increase of material well-being. But, as I argue in chapter four, the recognition of this problem does not necessarily require a return to orthodoxy. In fact, Spinoza's version of liberalism is noteworthy because it refuses to compromise philosophy's claim of dignity, and it promises to lay the basis for a spiritually and culturally rich democratic society which will not only allow the most outstanding intellects to flourish, but which will also be marked by a rich communal life and a robust and spirited dedication to the common good on the part of the citizenry. And yet, Spinoza goes much farther than Locke not only in seeking to undermine orthodox Christianity, but also in cultivating a self-absorbed, self-interested, and this-worldly ethic that looks down upon the Bible's devotional moral teaching as the relic of a backward and primitive age.

As I turn in chapter five to an analysis of Tocqueville, this question of devotion, and of the hopes for another world with which it is so frequently linked, becomes the theme of the dissertation. For Tocqueville, as I argue, found in America something that closely resembles the kind of self-interested and this-worldly version of Christianity which Locke sought to propagate, and he saw beneath the surface of that liberal piety a latent radicalism which was likely eventually to move in a secular, Spinozistic direction.

Observing the political life of a society whose religious and cultural outlook had been decisively shaped by the triumph of Enlightenment rationalism, Tocqueville came away deeply troubled by the tendency of that rationalism, as he put it, to do "a sort of moral violence" to human nature. Indeed, many of the pathologies and the dangers to democracy which he famously diagnosed are the products, as I will argue, of modernity's failure to carve out a place for the devotional longings which human beings feel, and which incline them not just to hope for another life, but to hope to *deserve* immortality by engaging in acts of self-overcoming or self-sacrifice. Because of this, according to Tocqueville, religion is much more deeply rooted in human nature than Locke or Spinoza acknowledge, and his political science seeks to make use of it in order to channel these longings in a healthy direction and to prevent them from taking on new forms which may yet threaten to bring about the eradication of both political freedom and what he calls "human greatness." By attempting to re-instill democracy with a spiritual aim and purpose, but one which also recognizes and seeks to preserve the very substantive goods which it can offer, Tocqueville, I conclude, articulates a new moral basis for liberalism—a civil religion which is capacious enough to permit tolerance but substantive enough to encourage real devotion. In so doing, he rises above the partisan fray of his time and our own, and he lays the basis for a kind of moderate politics seldom found in today's debates.

NEW DIVISIONS

Although social scientists have traditionally tended to focus on material factors when explaining the roots of key political disagreements, [7] students of contemporary politics have recently begun to take note of the increasing salience of a new set of religious and cultural cleavages. The disparity between Americans and Europeans as regards rates of church attendance and religious belief is by now a well-told story,[8] and over the past decade both journalists and political scientists have spoken with increasing frequency about an American polity which is becoming more and more polarized along "partisan, geographic, and cultural lines" (Abramowitz and Saunders 2005, 1). Election analyst Michael Barone, for example, has written that the "demographic factor most highly correlated with voting behavior in 2000 and 2004 was religion, or depth of religious belief,"[9] and political scientists Alan Abramowitz and Kyle L. Saunders similarly conclude that the divide on the electoral map between "red states" and "blue states" really does reflect a deepening cleavage between the secular, progressive, and

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[7] Wald and Wilcox rather bluntly—if hyperbolically—note that apart "from economics and geography, it is hard to find a social science that has given less attention to religion than political science." They attribute this trend largely to the field's tendency, perhaps reflecting the realities of much of twentieth century politics, either to perceive "class as the 'real' underlying force in electoral behavior" or to regard "religious forces" as "epiphenomenal, fossilized remnants of an *ancien regime*" (Wald and Wilcox 2006, 525). Of course, there are a large number of exceptions to this, many of which will be discussed below.

[8] According to the World Values Survey, 60% of French and 55% of Britons say that they "never" or "practically never" attend church. By contrast, 45% of Americans say that they go at least once a week and 60% once a month. 94% claim to believe in God, 75% believe in life after death, and 71% believe in Hell. 38% of Americans either agree or agree strongly that atheists are unfit for public office, compared to only 7% of Belgians, 9% of French, and 2% of Dutch (Source: World Values Survey, 1999-2002, www.worldvaluessurvey.org.).

[9] Barone 2008. Barone's prediction that this would change in 2008 was of course to some extent borne out, although it should also be noted that Obama's easy victory was accompanied by the successful passage of a same-sex marriage ban in California, one of the bluest of blue states and one which he carried with 61 percent of the vote. For an analysis of possible shifts in the cultural landscape during the 2008 election, see White 2009.

urban coasts, and the more religious and traditionalist 'Middle America.' Even though, according to these authors, most Americans "are moderates, or perhaps more accurately, [are] inconsistent in their political views" (4),[10] about a quarter of the overall electorate nonetheless consists of active partisans who have drifted farther apart politically (6) and become more loyal to one party (9) and more geographically concentrated over time (11). While more states are thus becoming 'safe' for one party or the other, in 2004 "the largest differences between red state voters and blue state voters" were about religion: "Compared with blue state voters, red state voters were much more likely to be Protestant, to consider themselves born-again or evangelical Christians, and to attend religious services at least once per week." (12).

The most salient division in American politics today, Abramowitz and Saunders conclude, is "between religious and secular voters." "There is a large group of voters who report that they attend religious services at least once per week; there is an equally large group who report that they seldom or never attend religious services" (12). In 2004, religion was the greatest predictor of the positions which voters took even on issues (such those involving foreign policy) which would seem little connected to matters of faith. White voters who reported attending religious services at least once a week were (predictably) more likely than those who did not to oppose abortion and gay marriage, but they were also substantially more likely to support the Iraq War, to approve of President Bush's job performance, to identify themselves as conservative, as Republican,

[10] All references over the next two paragraphs come from Abramowitz and Saunders 2005.

and to vote for Bush (14-15).[11] Among whites, religious identification and church attendance had more of an influence on voting behavior "than any other social characteristic including income, education, gender, marital status, and union membership" (15). Thus, Abramowitz and Sanders conclude, "The religious divide is now much deeper than the class divide in American politics" (16).

But even if it is the case that the American public is partitioning itself into ever more deeply entrenched cultural camps, it would still appear somewhat oversimplified to say that this division merely pits the religious against the secular. As Galston and Nivola point out, millions "of Protestants, 'modernist' evangelicals, Vatican II Catholics, and non-Orthodox Jews regularly vote Democratic," and in 2004 Bush and Kerry "split the mainline Protestant vote precisely down the middle" (Nivola and Brady 2006, 23). Self-identified secularists are now a core base of the Democratic party (ibid.) but they still only constitute around fifteen percent of the public. According to John C. Green, it is more useful to understand the electorate's political divisions by noting their correlation with a set of prior theological cleavages. Green's analysis of the 2004 National Survey of Religion and Politics takes the unusual step of classifying religious groups according to their degree of orthodoxy and their attitude towards modernity. He divides America's three main religious denominations into subgroups (which he terms Traditionalist, Centrist, and Modernist)[12] according to the their levels of religious engagement, the orthodoxy of their beliefs and practices, and their "desire to preserve such traditional

[11] There was at least a 19 percent difference in each of these categories.

beliefs and practices in a changing world" (Green 2004, 4).[13] According to Green, what is now most likely to influence one's political views is not whether one is loyal to this or that religious tradition but instead whether one is loyal to tradition as such. In his survey, more orthodox members of all faiths tended to identify themselves as conservative and as Republican, while modernists, along with self-described atheists and agnostics, overwhelmingly described themselves as liberal and as Democratic (ibid., 3, 52-3). On the whole, traditionalists were more likely not only to oppose abortion and same-sex marriage (ibid., 39-40, 45), but also to take conservative positions on non-social issues such as those relating to economic and foreign policy (ibid., 20-1, 30-1). On the other hand, modernists from all denominations were likely to take liberal positions on all kinds of political questions, with self-described secularists, atheists, and agnostics sitting furthest to the Left (ibid., 3, 20, 31, 40, 45).

Green's analysis begins to describe the political importance and perhaps the culmination of a sociological trend that has been growing over the past two decades. As E.J. Dionne Jr. notes, religious fault-lines which formerly ran between denominations now run across them.[14] Liberal Catholics, Protestants, and Jews now ally themselves together against conservative members of their own faiths, while conservatives from all traditions overlook specific differences of theology and regard each other as common allies in a fight against the secularizing forces of modernity (Nivola and Brady 2006,

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[12] These denominations are Evangelical Protestants (26%), Mainline Protestants (16%), Catholics (18%), as well as the Unaffiliated (16%). The remainder of the survey was made up of several smaller groups, such as Black and Latino churches, Jews, and other Christian and non-Christian groups (Green 2004, 3).

[13] Traditionalists were more likely to read Scripture regularly, to have a high view of the Bible's authority, and to believe in a personal God and an afterlife. For the full coding criteria see Green 2004, 55-6.

200). And this religious reshuffling, by bringing new, cultural issues to the fore, has gone together with a realignment of the two major American parties. Green notes that Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants are now "in the process of trading places in the Republican coalition" (Green 2004, 10). His analysis confirms what the electoral maps told us in 2000 and 2004: well-to-do social liberals from the urban centers of the Northeast and the West Coast are leaving the Republican Party, and traditionalist Christians from the Midwest and the South are taking their place. As Galston and Nivola point out, up until the 1970s the two parties often overlapped ideologically and were made up of broad coalitions representing diverse segments of the country. Southern conservatives and members of the Northern working class voted Democratic; affluent but socially moderate urban Northeasterners as well as conservative Western agrarians voted Republican (Nivola and Brady 2006, 10). But, as Dionne notes, the "cultural battles of the 1960s redefined not only the right, but also the left" (ibid., 177). In their aftermath, American liberals have changed their points of emphasis to cultural matters: whereas trade-unionism, market regulation, and various welfare measures were the former litmus tests for membership within the Democratic party, these have now been replaced by abortion, "stem-cell research, gay marriage, and Hollywood culture" (ibid., 177). Similarly, on the Right, "Religious conservatives, ignited by court decisions on school prayer and abortion and reacting against what they saw as the depredations of trashy magazines, movies, and television programs, decried the growing 'secularization' of America" and launched an attempt "to restore the consensus on values that existed—or at

[14] This observation was first made by Wuthnow (1988). See also Layman 1997.

least seemed to exist—before the 1960s" (ibid., 194). While Republicans therefore turned away from their traditional constituency—the affluent—and created a new base for themselves by "appealing to the cultural concerns of whites with moderate incomes and socially conservative views," Democrats saw an opportunity to gain support among "social liberals in the upper middle class" who had long voted Republican but who had no use for things like restrictions on abortion (ibid. 178).[15]

LIBERALISM AND THE CULTURE WARS

Because this shift in the American political landscape appears rooted in a more fundamental sociological cleavage, it will be helpful briefly to examine the character of this divide. Over the past several decades James Davison Hunter has forcefully argued that apparent political disagreements between liberals and conservatives can often be traced to a deeper quarrel about the meaning of liberal-democracy and of America's national identity (Hunter 1991, Hunter 1994, Hunter and Wolfe 2006). Hunter insists that the collapse following the Second World War of a moral consensus rooted in the Bible (Hunter 1991, 67-77)[16] has brought about "a fundamental realignment in American culture" (47). The United States, he claims, is now split between "competing moral visions" (43): an "orthodox" one which remains loyal to that "longstanding Judeo-Christian consensus" (76) and considers moral rules to be fixed and absolute, and a "progressive" one which sees them as flexible and dependent on historical circumstances

[15] For further analysis of this current realignment of the American parties, see also Miller and Schofield 2008.

(43, 48, 118). Both "factions strongly affirm the ideals of the American democratic tradition," but because "they understand this tradition differently," they often view themselves as the true guardians of liberalism and their opponents as grave threats to it (Hunter and Wolfe 2006, 25).[17]

The orthodox moral vision, as Hunter presents it, takes its bearings from a "universally valid" moral authority which applies in "every circumstance and context" (121). Its adherents often speak of natural rights, but their authority is not Enlightenment rationalism but instead a specific brand of theology (121-2). They claim that liberalism must be anchored in a set of principles which can be found in a very broad and capacious reading of the Bible—a reading which can discover the moral code all Christians as well as Jews share in common (109-10). Widespread religious belief, they maintain, is crucial for democracy's health because it endows it with a lofty aim and purpose all the while inculcating a set of moral restraints which are necessary for the preservation of freedom (109-10). Democracy is "the embodiment of Providential wisdom" and divine righteousness (109), but, as Gertrude Himmelfarb has argued, its maintenance requires the "self-discipline, self-restraint, self-control," and "self-reliance" which only religion can provide (Himmelfarb 1999, 85). Freedom, according to this account, should thus be understood in a positive and therefore restricted sense: it is not the license of the individual to do what he pleases but instead "the freedom of a *society* to govern itself—what philosopher Charles Taylor has called 'civic freedom'" (110, emphasis original).

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[16] Unless otherwise noted, all references over the next several paragraphs come from Hunter 1991.

[17] Consider the rhetoric employed by those partisans quoted by Hunter in his prologue entitled "Stories from the Front," e.g. at 25, 27-8.

Liberty is an opportunity for the individual to serve his community by acting virtuously in accordance with certain fixed moral guidelines—guidelines which serve in turn to restrict liberty within modest bounds.

The orthodox account claims that America's providential blessings also give it special duties, and that is why "America has a unique mission to extend the boundaries of liberty and righteousness" (quoted on 112). A foreign policy which aims to maintain and if possible spread democracy abroad affirms the historical superiority of liberalism while simultaneously preserving a sense that liberty exists primarily for service to others. Indeed, it is precisely because they perceive that this idea of self-sacrifice is being lost sight of that members of the orthodox camp tend to support a socially conservative agenda which pays particular attention to sexual mores and to the protection of the traditional family (122). Americans, they seem to believe, are too much out for themselves. Himmelfarb, for example, argues that capitalism's tendency to produce "an unseemly materialism and hedonism" (Himmelfarb 1999, 12 fn), while not economically damaging, risks bringing about a kind of spiritual diminution which is gravely threatening to the future of humanity (Himmefarb 1999, 13). The traditional family, on the other hand, is seen as the bedrock of morality because it restrains these impulses, and orthodox opposition to abortion, feminism, and same-sex marriage can thus be regarded as arising from a desire to apply some brakes to a liberal political order which has been left too much to its own devices.

The orthodox call for moral restraint, however, should not blind us to this camp's allegiance to liberalism itself. Alan Wolfe, a critic of Hunter who places himself on the

Left and who has written extensively on religion, cautions that America's religious conservatives are "most definitely *not* trying to impose their Christian beliefs on an increasingly secular society" (Wolfe 1998, 67, emphasis original). Rather, they tend to speak in terms of toleration and of rights—for example, of the need for a secular society to tolerate the free exercise of religion (Wolfe 1998, 67) or of the rights of parents to raise their children as they see fit (Wolfe 1998, 122). But perhaps no fact better illustrates the orthodox camp's allegiance to basic liberal principles than its near-universal embrace of capitalism. As Hunter makes clear, leading voices on this side of the cultural divide find a sacrosanct right to unlimited material acquisition in the very same sources in which they hope to discover moral restraints. Hunter quotes Jerry Falwell's declaration that "the free enterprise system is clearly outlined in the Book of Proverbs" and was endorsed by Jesus Christ: "Ownership of property is biblical. Competition in business is biblical" (quoted on 111). Moreover, Hunter notes that among many contemporary pop theologians the idea of Christian charity—"Give and you'll be given unto"— has taken a decidedly self-interested and profit-oriented turn (112). Religious conservatives as Hunter presents them seem not to know about the Biblical teaching on the sin of greed or that the proper relation of man to material possessions according to Scripture is not ownership but stewardship.[18]

On the other side of the cultural divide, progressives too show a tendency simultaneously to reject and embrace the core tenets of Enlightenment liberalism. As

[18] See, for example, 1 Timothy 6:10-17. For a glimpse of the potential origins of today's pro-capitalist theologies, see Locke's reinterpretation of that passage in Chapter Five of the *Second Treatise of*

Hunter describes them, progressives eschew the absolutism of modern rationalism and instead look upon truth as a "process" or "as a reality that is ever unfolding" (44). A rapidly growing number of them profess no religion at all,[19] and those who do frequently tend to "*resymbolize historic faiths according to the prevailing assumptions of contemporary life*" (44-5, emphasis original). Claiming that "traditional sources of moral authority" such as Scripture "no longer have . . . binding power over their lives" (45), they tend to join denominations (such as Reform Judaism or Mainline Protestantism) which have made their peace with secular intellectual trends and which thus downplay "the supernatural and miraculous aspects" of the Bible in favor of "an almost exclusive emphasis upon its ethical" message (79).

That ethical message, however, far from being permanently valid, must be uniquely adapted to "human relationships today" (124). Traditional faith, or the morality that is actually contained in the Bible, according to Hunter's progressives, "is no longer relevant for modern times" because "moral and spiritual truth" itself is not "static and unchanging" but "a growing and incremental reality." Morality is "conditional and relative" (123), and so today's ethical guidelines are similarly of no validity outside of our current (liberal-democratic) historical circumstances. Indeed, as Hunter summarizes it, the "dominant basis of moral reasoning" among progressives is a subjectivism which grounds ethical authority solely in "personal experience." Associated ultimately with "Kant, Existentialism, and the various streams of Heideggerian hermeneutical philosophy

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Government (section 31). Locke's attempt to downplay the New Testament's calls for self-sacrifice will be discussed at greater length in chapter three.

such as found in Wittgenstein and Richard Rorty," this position holds that "experience is ordered and moral judgments are made according to a logic rooted in subjective intuition and understanding," the underlying premise being that "by virtue of our symbolic activity, we human beings are responsible for the way the world is." In practical terms, this translates into a praise for "expressive individualism" as well as "a moral pragmatism centered around the individual's personal conception of his or her own emotional needs or psychological disposition" (125). Ethical rules are relative to "the private whim or personal perspective of individuals" (126), and the values that are present in any given community of such individuals must be "loose-bounded" and "oriented toward legitimating the prevailing *zeitgeist*" (126-7).

In Hunter's description, however, this belief in the mutability of all values seems always to accompany a certain moralism with which it appears to be in tension. He notes that members of progressivist religious groups still look to their respective traditions in an effort to find "universal ethical principles" which can lead to "the fulfillment of human needs and aspirations," and their simultaneous rejection of the "absolute authority" (124) of those traditions may have much to do with a perceived threat which that authority poses to these same aspirations. Similarly, thoroughly secular progressives retain "latent value orientations." These tend to coalesce into an outlook which judges everything according to the standard of "human well-being" and which gives particular emphasis to "the ethical themes of autonomy and freedom," especially as regards "individual or minority self-determination" (75-6). Hunter does not comment on this possibility, but

[19] In the 1999 World Values Survey 20% of Americans listed their religion as "none." When Hunter wrote

when reading his account one is led to wonder whether the progressivist rejection of all absolute standards is not itself inextricably linked to a belief in the moral superiority of the particular outlook that is held to result as a consequence of that rejection. The "aim of the progressivists' vision," he writes, "is the further emancipation of the human spirit and the creation of an inclusive and tolerant world" (Hunter and Wolfe 2006, 15). They do seem to look forward to a future which will be characterized by an historically superior human good—a good which involves the flourishing of authentic human relationships unsullied by power and domination, as well as the realization of the long-suppressed aspirations for self-determination of individuals and minority groups.

Indeed, when it comes to more practical questions, the relativism of Hunter's progressives actually seems to serve as a gateway to a deeply felt moralism. Restrictions on abortion, for example, are said to be unjust not only because there is no fixed moment at which life begins (126) but also because they limit individual freedom of choice—and being "oppressed is the absence of choice" (114). Traditional gender roles can be abolished because they are simply "human constructions imposed through socialization," but they also ought to be, since that socialization was conducted by "powerful and sometimes oppressive institutions" (126). Finally, homosexuality and other non-traditional family arrangements are permissible because the various forms which the family can take are "historically and culturally variable," but these arrangements are legitimate only "as long as those forms reflect a positive and caring relationship" (126)—an abusive relationship presumably would not be justified. Combining a rejection of

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in 1991 the number he cited was 11% (Hunter 1991, 76).

moral absolutism with an idealistic vision of a more just society, Hunter's progressives appear to regard the sources of authority revered by their adversaries as residues of institutions which were formerly used to control minds and tell people how to live. Conversely, they regard liberal-democracy as a regime which is dedicated to the liberation of human beings from such shackles—a regime which will permit men and women to live as free, choice-making beings and tolerate and accept one another for who they are authentically. The chief aim of the American Founders, they insist, was "to establish and preserve 'pluralism and diversity'" (114). Thus, far from requiring widespread religious belief, the Constitution established "a secular, humanistic state" in which individuals could live by their own lights and become, in the words of Arthur Schlesinger, "skeptical, irreverent, pluralistic and relativistic" (quoted on 113).

Freedom in the progressivist account should therefore be understood negatively and "in terms of the social and political rights of individuals. This is what Charles Taylor has called 'liberal' freedom (as opposed to 'civic' freedom, mentioned earlier)," and it especially emphasizes the need of the individual to be "granted immunity from interference by others in his life, either by state or church or by other individuals'" (114). Relativism here connects to the virtue of tolerance, for it frees us from absolutist doctrines which prevent us from living however we wish. For the same reasons, the progressives insist that "the founders gave us a 'living Constitution,'" for they did not want us to "be straightjacketed" to the outdated ideas of the past (113-4). In progressive thought as Hunter summarizes it, the idea of negative liberty is inextricably linked to a deeply felt sense of justice, which is defined in terms of a celebration of diversity and

"the end of oppression" (114). This is why progressives tend to highlight the plights of groups who are thought to have had their voices silenced (115). And because empowering marginalized groups requires economic redistribution, the progressives' relativism eventually gives way to deeply moralistic calls for "social justice"—calls which underlie not only the Left's support for the welfare state but also its distrust of American power (which is held to create vast inequalities in the world) (115).

THE MUDDLED MIDDLE

Hunter's analysis seems to capture the key elements of the worldviews that lie beneath the statements of the most vociferous warriors in America's culture wars—of politicians, editorialists, and the leaders of advocacy groups. But he insists, and a vast body of empirical literature confirms, that most Americans reside somewhere between the two extremes which he describes.[20] But those extremes remain sizable. Hunter estimates that around 5 to 7 percent of Americans (or 10 to 12 million people) are "committed partisans of the Christian right and of the progressive left," but one quarter of the overall population (some 60 million people) is less active though sympathetic to one side or the other (Hunter and Wolfe 2006, 25).[21] More crucially, however, the zealous minority contains society's elite opinion-shapers who control the political landscape, set

[20] Other than Wolfe, the most influential critic of the idea that Americans are deeply divided is perhaps Fiorina (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2005). See also Davis and Robinson 1996, DiMaggio, Evans, and Bryson 1996, and Evans 2003.

[21] Galston and Nivola similarly point out that even though a plurality of Americans stake out moderate or compromise positions on social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, a large majority (over 60 percent) still inhabits the extremes (Nivola and Brady 2006, 182-3).

the tone and agenda of public debate, and determine the options which members of the "soft middle" have to choose from (Hunter and Wolfe 2006, 33).

Most Americans are united in their common allegiance to basic liberal principles, but the "struggle to define America" which Hunter describes is about how those principles should be properly understood. Indeed, the orthodox and progressive camps appear to present competing visions of liberalism which divide Americans not only against each other but even within themselves. Alan Wolfe, Hunter's foremost critic, has argued that the culture war is being fought only by intellectuals and that most Americans inhabit a so-called muddled middle (Wolfe 1998, 276). Yet, he also admits that since those intellectuals determine the available options, the culture war also takes "place inside Americans." Wolfe claims that Americans are pulled both ways. They believe in "both traditional religious values and personal freedom" (Hunter and Wolfe 2006, 46); they support the right of women to work, for example, but they also lament the effect which that has had on the family (Wolfe 1998, 107, 113-4). The culture war, according to Wolfe, should therefore really be seen as a divide "between sets of values important to everyone" (Wolfe 1998, 279). Americans continue to muddle through, but should their ability to craft a tension-ridden *modus vivendi* be a cause for optimism? On the contrary, this may only signal that there is no consensus about the meaning and the basis of the liberal principles we cherish. Our apparent agreement may hide a deeper division that cuts to the heart of the character of our polity.[22]

[22] Whereas Wolfe argues that a moral disagreement which exists among elites effects the lives of ordinary people by tugging them in different directions, Morris Fiorina goes a step further. Relying exclusively on anecdotal evidence, Fiorina and his co-authors state that the very "idea of a culture war is something

Indeed, this may appear all the more troubling once we consider that both sides in the culture wars are looking to defend liberalism by turning to schools of thought which are fundamentally alien to it. Their problematic attempts to reconcile modern democracy with the Bible, on the one hand, or with German historicism, on the other, leave both sides exposed to damaging criticisms from their opponents. The progressive Left's problematic mix of relativism and moralism, for example, appears to be the result of an attempt "to turn something into a support for liberalism" that was originally intended to be its "death blow" (Owen 2001, 92). What James Ceaser appropriately calls "idealistic anti-foundationalism" (Ceaser 2006, 76) tries to link deeply felt democratic sentiments to a "radical version of historicism" (ibid., 72) which can ultimately be traced back to Nietzsche and Heidegger, two thinkers who had anything but respect for human equality. Nietzsche, of course, called for democracy's destruction because he predicted that it would create a spiritually sub-human being called the last man. But according to Ceaser, the most theoretically influential thought on the American Left today embraces Nietzsche's historicism while trying to overlook his rejection of democracy. Contemporary "neo-pragmatism or anti-foundationalism" calls for even more democracy, all the while claiming that such democracy cannot be grounded in anything deeper than "narratives of hope" (ibid., 74-5).

Turning to a brief analysis of Richard Rorty, Ceaser writes that narratives "sound a bit like foundations," but since they are not seen as "tied to deeper structures of reality"

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completely unfamiliar to most Americans" (Fiorina, Abrams, and Pope, 2005, 21 n. 14; see also the epigraph to his book). This more radical conclusion, which Wolfe would likely disagree with, seems to sit uneasily with the evidence which both Wolfe and Hunter present.

they are not quite as serious. Nobody would "sacrifice for a narrative" (ibid., 75); no one would die for it, kill for it, or try to impose it upon his neighbor. The replacement of foundations with narratives is seen by Rorty and other neo-pragmatist thinkers as healthy because it leads to an indifference to serious questions. It instills a live-and-let-live attitude which encourages toleration and precludes "rigid or absolutist politics" (ibid., 75). In response to this, however, critics such as Ceaser and Owen have argued that rather than encouraging openness to alternative points of view, such widespread skepticism might create a citizenry which is "listless, apathetic, and lacking in resolve" (ibid., 87). Owen notes that Rorty goes so far as to acknowledge that the acceptance of liberalism and tolerance "means conceding to Nietzsche that democratic societies have no higher aim than what he called 'the last men'" (quoted in Owen 2001, 187 n.7). Rorty simply concedes that "the prevalence of such people may be a reasonable price to pay for freedom" (quoted in Owen 2001, 90). But even on its own terms this response appears to be profoundly inadequate. As Owen notes, recalling Tocqueville's warning that spiritual decline is linked to despotism, "A free society must concern itself with the sort of people it produces, lest it produce those who do not vigilantly guard their liberty" (Owen 2001, 91). Indeed, Ceaser recalls that "the skepticism that came to prevail in many of the new democracies of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s" left a "vacuum at the center of political life" which was eventually filled by dangerous, anti-democratic ideologies (Ceaser 2006, 86-7).

If the progressive Left tries to use originally illiberal thought to defend toleration, the religious Right may be said to make the opposite error. By reading liberalism and

democracy into the Bible, today's Christian conservatives may ultimately risk bringing about this same listlessness and apathy. Such, at any rate, is the conclusion which Wolfe points to when he describes how politically conservative religion in the United States today is often permeated by the same individualistic cultural trends against which it is usually thought to be a reaction. Americans, he writes, "take their religion seriously," but very few take it so seriously that they see it as a guide for "how *other* people should live" (Wolfe 1998, 55, emphasis original). Not only do they consider faith to be a strictly private matter, they also redefine religion to mold it to their pre-existing liberal tastes (ibid., 62)—tastes which include non-judgmentalism, a live-and-let-live attitude, and a respect for the private beliefs of others. Wolfe reports that even the most conservative Americans whom he interviewed seldom used terms like "sin" or "moral rot" (ibid., 48-9), and the overwhelming majority of his sample agreed with the statement that "There are many different religious truths and we ought to be tolerant of all of them." Americans, he succinctly concludes, "have added an Eleventh Commandment,": "Thou shalt not judge" (ibid., 54).

Calls for a return to a pre-modern style of faith, Wolfe insists, originate from a deep misapprehension of our contemporary situation (ibid., 303). Indeed, the Christian conservatism of the heartland which seems to be carrying out such a return has in fact been infiltrated by the most modern and liberal cultural tendencies (Hunter and Wolfe 2006, 59-61). In his detailed survey of religion in the United States, Wolfe points out that Americans tend to approach their faith as they do almost everything else in their lives: individualistically. Evangelicalism in particular is growing because, by

emphasizing the possibility of a personal relationship with God—and a kinder, gentler God at that (Wolfe 2003, 165)[23]—it fits in seamlessly with larger cultural trends. Evangelical services are "personal, enthusiastic, unstructured, and informal;" pastors dress down, play rock music, and address God colloquially (26). In a country where people frequently go shopping for places of worship (44-5), to attract members churches have had to highlight the "personal sides of faith" (35) and downplay the likes of liturgy, creed, and doctrine (which parishioners find to be divisive and thus unappealing). As a result, according to Wolfe, the spiritual life which one finds on display in culturally conservative churches is rather unimpressive. Sermons are theologically thin and rarely assert that the requirements for salvation are complex or difficult (31). The music is bad and reflects the bathos of popular culture (29, 126). Most alarmingly, the emphasis of worship is placed on the individual's needs and desires rather than on community, duties, or obligations to tradition (65). In its more extreme incarnations, this latter tendency has resulted in such narcissistic teachings as "prosperity theology" (32) and Bruce Wilkinson's *The Prayer of Jabez*, a book which sold nine million copies and instructs believers to pray for the increase of their investment portfolios (33-4).[24]

But, if Wolfe is unimpressed with this lack of moral seriousness, he is all the more discouraged by the lack of intellectual life which he finds in America's conservative churches. The de-emphasis of doctrine, he writes, has dumbed religion down and prevented it from encouraging serious thought about man, his duties to others,

[23] Unless otherwise noted, all references over the next several paragraphs come from this work.
[24] One Baptist minister told Wolfe that "If we use the words redemption or conversion" to congregations "they think we're talking about bonds" (Wolfe 2003, 81).

and his place in the cosmos. Churchgoing Americans tend to know little about the Bible (69-74), and even fundamentalists—among whom one would expect to find the most Biblical literacy—tend to pay attention only to its specific injunctions so that they may apply them to their daily lives (69).[25] They rarely consider Scripture as a collection of ideas, and in this, according to Wolfe, they merely reflect the anti-intellectualism and the distaste for ideas that permeates society today (68-9). Among all religious groups, talk of one's personal relationship with God which also tries to avoid controversy not only discourages "any kind of doctrinal reflection" (74), it also puts an emphasis on feeling rather than thinking. This is why Pentecostalism, a charismatic religion which looks for communion with God through experience and emotion, has recently grown so rapidly. "Pentecostal forms of religious expression have become popular because—like increasing numbers of school teachers, leaders of therapeutic communities, mental-health professionals, and even occasional academics who live in secular worlds—they seek authenticity through experience rather than through ideas" (81).

Wolfe's final assessment of conservative religion in America is mixed. As a liberal and a professed nonbeliever (184), he finds its individualistic and even materialistic (95) brand of Christianity to be encouragingly supportive of tolerance. He reassures his fellow progressives that there is no real attempt on the Right to "restore traditional morality to the country" (125). Even as America has moved to the Right politically, it has actually moved to the Left culturally (126), and those who say that they take the Bible literally actually tend not to live that way (252). Evangelicals who "prefer

[25] This, however, should not be construed to suggest that fundamentalists are uneducated. Wolfe is quick

a God of love to a God of truth are not going to kill for their beliefs" (261), and the decline of the idea that certain beliefs are required for salvation—along with the religious shopping that the de-emphasis of doctrine encourages—"acts as a kind of insurance policy against bigotry" (262). At the same time, however, Wolfe cannot consistently maintain the position that the frivolities of American religious life often "turn out to be blessings in disguise" (262). For even if the decline of a serious belief in sin is conducive to tolerance, it also "makes it difficult for the faithful to emphasize classic religious themes such as duty and responsibility" (183). "As a nonbeliever," Wolfe candidly writes, "I ought to be encouraged by this development," but "somehow I am not pleased with this retreat from sin, for the ease with which American religious believers adopt nonjudgmental language and a psychological understanding of wrongdoing is detrimental to anyone, religious or not, who believes that individuals should judge their actions against the highest possible ideals of human conduct" (184).

In a bizarre way, Wolfe's analysis actually confirms the criticism of liberalism voiced by religious conservatives. So successful has liberalism been at undermining a sense of duty that in America religion itself, which was supposed to restrain selfishness, actually caters to individual desires and never issues commands "that seriously conflict with modern beliefs" (Wolfe 1998, 298). Because he finds that Americans "go overboard" in their commitment to toleration, Wolfe claims to discover "considerable evidence" for the view that the spread of "cultural relativism or secular humanism" has rendered Americans unable "to appreciate what is truly valuable in a world of

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to dismiss this idea as a myth (Wolfe 2003, 69).

transcendental truths" (Wolfe 1998, 298). As William Galston notes, Wolfe's analysis points to a growing danger: "A choice-based conception of social life leads to instrumental bonds, a cult of conflict avoidance, an absence of real engagement, and a loss of seriousness" (Galston 1998, 119). Echoing criticism from the Right, Galston—who is no conservative—warns that liberalism may be unable to endure without the restraints provided by the old-fashioned outlook which, according to Wolfe, is decidedly not present in conservative religion as it is actually practiced.

> This new morality—do what you choose, when you choose, without fear of legal coercion or social disapproval—is an experiment without precedent in human history. Perhaps it will succeed; I doubt it. At some point, we will be called upon for sacrifices that we can't pay others to make on our behalf. And then we will see whether the self-protective nonjudgmentalism Wolfe so ably describes constitutes an adequate basis for a free society (Galston 1998, 120).

What Wolfe appears to desire is a middle path which can encourage tolerance while preserving the moral and intellectual seriousness which today's tolerant cultural attitudes actually seem to threaten. He seems to be searching for a popular religious outlook which is capacious enough to discourage persecution but also narrow enough to focus attention on serious questions about man's duties to God and his neighbor. This is perhaps the key question in contemporary debates between progressives who link religion to intolerance and conservatives who emphasize its role in inculcating moral seriousness. Both sides of course claim to achieve this mean and thus to preserve liberal principles while rejecting their Enlightenment origins. But can liberalism draw its strength from elsewhere without sacrificing either tolerance or human greatness? The survey of popular arguments and sociological trends contained in this chapter has suggested that the

orthodox and progressive attempts to do this may suffer from grave problems. But it might of course be the case that the tensions which seem to be contained in the outlooks of politicians, journalists, and ordinary voters could be resolved through more thoroughgoing efforts to elucidate coherent versions of these competing liberalisms. Contemporary thinkers who have presented theoretical articulations of the outlooks of one or the other camp, after all, may well be able to provide consistent and satisfying legitimations of modern democracy that do not require the support of Enlightenment rationalism. To judge whether these enterprises have been successful, and thus whether the versions of liberalism they contain can stand firm, it will be useful next to turn to an examination of some of the most articulate spokesmen for the religious Right and the progressive Left.

Chapter 2: The Weaknesses of Today's Partisan Liberalisms

"This book is not precisely in anyone's camp; in writing it I did not mean either to serve or to contest any party; I undertook to see, not differently, but further than the parties."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 15

The previous chapter has attempted to show the way in which our current political climate is divided between two competing moral visions of what modern democracy is and what it stands for. At the level of popular or journalistic polemics, these outlooks frequently show themselves to be "less than coherent" (Hunter 1991, 43), and so to gain a fuller appreciation of the thought animating political life today, it will be necessary to turn to some of the authors who have attempted to present them in theoretically consistent forms. If these presentations, in turn, should come to sight as tension-ridden or otherwise unsatisfactory, it will then be possible, in true Tocquevillian fashion, to move beyond today's partisan debates to a deeper appreciation of our contemporary situation.

As we have seen, both sides in these debates display an attachment to liberalism which is in some way linked to their common tendency to reject, on deeply moralistic grounds, the outlook of Enlightenment rationalism. Thus, as this chapter will show, the authors whose work constitutes the theoretical backbone of the Christian Right display an unreserved hostility to the alleged atheistic materialism of the social contract tradition, but they fault that tradition in large part because they find it incapable of sustaining a democratic and egalitarian view of human dignity and human freedom. And yet, in looking instead to the Bible and to the Christian theological tradition for a defense of modern notions of human rights, they seem to overlook the potentially illiberal and

undemocratic teachings of those sources. Indeed, the theological support for liberalism which they discover there owes much to the Enlightenment tradition which they reject—a tradition which broke from the authorities to which they seek to return—and the conception of public piety that they look to as a replacement for modern rationalism therefore may very well be infused with the same troubling individualistic tendencies which they elsewhere inveigh against.

In a similar fashion, today's secular progressives also reject the original moral foundations of democracy on the grounds that these are undemocratic. Thus, John Rawls, motivated by an apparent injustice inherent in all moral or philosophical absolutism, has sought to show how liberal-democracy, conceived as a society characterized by the flourishing of numerous, incommensurable worldviews, can fulfill its moral promise of radical pluralism. But as this formulation of his thought should hopefully make clear, Rawls' project of political (as opposed to metaphysical) liberalism seems to be plagued by a deep confusion: for the very commitment to moral relativism which leads Rawls to reject Enlightenment rationalism is also itself deeply moralistic. His liberalism is therefore marked by an unrecognized moral absolutism, and that absolutism manifests itself politically in a common moral agreement whose existence he seems to presuppose among democratic citizens—which in turn suggests that his society is not and cannot be as radically pluralist as he thinks. Like his adversaries on the Right, Rawls inherits, and incorporates into his political philosophy, a moral and theological outlook which owes its origins to the Enlightenment's reform of Christianity. Ultimately, then, the shortcomings of both versions of liberalism which we will examine in this chapter will point us to the

need for a fresh examination of the Enlightenment—an examination which will potentially make clear the moral justifications for liberalism which both the Left and the Right require but cannot provide, and which will furthermore indicate whether their respective rejections of it are justified.

CHRISTIAN LIBERALISM: A NEW POSTMODERNISM

To form an understanding of the conservative position in contemporary American debates about religion's relationship to democracy, it will be helpful to begin with an analysis of the Right's rejection, on religious but also liberal-democratic grounds, of modern rationalism. One of the most serious and far-reaching attempts to articulate the details of a postmodern Christian politics has been carried out by Peter Augustine Lawler, who celebrates the apparent collapse not only of the Enlightenment, but also of all modern political rationalism, on the grounds that it failed to recognize, let alone satisfy, humanity's deepest needs. According to Lawler, modern thought from Machiavelli to Marx has been united in a common attractive yet ultimately flawed endeavor: the modern philosophers all believed that if science could "master or overcome nature" by subjecting it to limitless rational control, then it could also eradicate suffering (Lawler 1999, 1).[26] Believing that they could "make for themselves in this world what God promises in the imaginary world to come," the moderns rebelled against the Biblical God—who denies

[26] All citations over the next several paragraphs come from this work.

the "possibility of definitive success of merely human efforts"—and tried to show that men could be satisfied without any thought of what lies beyond this life (16).

According to Lawler, this vision of a society of satisfied secularists reaches its culmination in the idea of the "end of history," a concept which Francis Fukuyama misunderstood because he mistakenly supposed that a society without suffering could still be populated by "free and dignified human beings" (16). The modern project as Lawler describes it was premised on the scientific view that humans, like other beings, are "just 'stuff' or matter" (19). Rousseau, for example, claimed that human beings in nature were so unselfconscious that they lacked an awareness of their own mortality, and the triumph of the modern project would entail the recreation of such a state in which the "core of human individuality"—our restless awareness that each of us will die and die alone—has been eradicated (23). But since death, of course, cannot be overcome by natural means, it follows that only a kind of lobotomy can eliminate this suffering, and the modern project's ultimate task is therefore to make humans at home in this world by making them forget about their mortality. In contrast to Christian theology, which holds with Pascal that man will always remain "dissatisfied," "not totally at home in this world," and therefore perpetually in need of communion with the divine (32), the whole modern scientific establishment is now devoted to demonstrating that this condition is, so to speak, curable (36-7). Thus, according to Lawler, there already exists a troubling tendency among Americans "to live immersed thoughtlessly in the present" (28), and to turn, for example, to psychotherapy in order to prove Pascal wrong by putting their own experiences of death to death (28, 36-7).

Now, Lawler attributes the most far-reaching attempt to do this to postmodernism "as it is usually understood," or to the anti-foundationalist thought of secular progressives like Richard Rorty, whose subjectivist philosophy permits him to claim that the experience of death can be removed by a kind of linguistic engineering (45-6). This is why this kind of postmodernism "is really hypermodernism" (2), for by doing this it finally brings to fruition the Enlightenment's "merely material and secular goal" of "mortal life as it might be lived in the sunlit uplands of global democracy and abundance'" (quoted on 48). But as Lawler notes, Rorty is also forced to admit that the lack of concern with death which he hopes will characterize "bourgeois culture" is an "anti-Socratic view" (54). He concedes that "we, the people who value self-consciousness" (quoted on 55), will not find a home within it, and he even goes so far as to admit that his hoped-for future state "is the one Kojève finds at history's end, the 'nihilistic wasteland' of Martin Heidegger populated by Friedrich Nietzsche's 'last men'" (54). His liberalism, he admits, "will not be a home to "serious philosophy, artistic excellence, and noble deeds." Indeed, he "cheerfully acknowledges that 'the typical character types of liberal democracies are bland, calculating, petty, and unheroic,'" but he blithely affirms that this is simply "the price we pay" for liberating men from their experience of mortality (54) or, to say the same thing, for "alleviating misery" (55).

If the full triumph of the Enlightenment were possible, according to Lawler, it would necessarily signal the final destruction of human greatness and human dignity. Fortunately, from his point of view, the colossal failure of the modern project proved to be inevitable for the simple reason that human nature necessarily rebelled against it.

What is needed to take its place is what he calls "Postmodernism rightly understood" (1), a return to "Pascal's Augustinian psychological realism" (5), which he also says is compatible with "Socratic or Thomistic rationalism" (2). This "Christian realism" (5) finds a source for the dignity of the individual in his solitary experience "of the mystery and alienation of being human" (12)—an experience which leads each person to come to an awareness "of his own limits and so of his need for God" (5). Thus, reflection on the reasons for modernity's failure—on the threat it poses to human dignity and the hubris of its attempt to eliminate suffering—suggests the wisdom of a renewed openness to revelation.

While Lawler thus claims that the triumph of modern democracy poses a grave threat to human dignity, his call for a return to Christianity is intended not as a replacement for liberalism but, indeed, as a new foundation for it. In the work of Walker Percy, for example, he discovers a defense of individual rights against the "mishmash anthropology" which Thomas Jefferson articulated in the Declaration of Independence—for while Jefferson, according to Percy, defined man "as a creature," or as a created being with inherent worth, he also incoherently claimed that that creature "was endowed with the purpose of pursuing this-worldly, self-won happiness" (94). Because the modern scientific view of man cannot regard him as more than material, the Declaration's moral teaching is necessarily parasitic on the leftovers of a Christian understanding which discovers "the foundation of the dignity of the human individual" and the "source of personal sovereignty and so of individual rights" in the "courageous experience" of self-conscious mortality (94, 96). In the absence of this, modern scientific materialism

permits the treatment of human beings as though they were no more than matter. Its notion of human autonomy, which liberates the self "for the pursuit of 'its own destiny without God'" (quoted on 95) frees human beings from all moral limitations, and it is therefore "responsible for most of the murder and gratuitous violence of our century" (95; cf. 141-2). This same warning, according to Lawler, can also be found in the right-wing populism of Christopher Lasch, who juxtaposes the quest for happiness of America's urban and scientific elite to the "democratic moral responsibility" of its religious heartland (171). While the latter's outlook, according to Lasch, is characterized by a sober awareness of human limitations, that of the former is characterized by a "pro-choice" position which holds that human existence is neither mysterious nor sacred, and that there are thus no legitimate barriers to the pursuit of felicity in the here and now (181). Like Percy, Lasch holds that this position "leads to the elimination of whole classes of human beings" (182), and he supports a socially conservative agenda from the conviction that the "rule of law and limited democracy depend on respect for the personal mysteries of sex, love, and death" (171).

Lawler, then, calls attention to the work of Percy and Lasch because, in his estimation, they mount an authentically Biblical defense of liberal-democracy. Lawler calls Percy a Thomist (106), but his particular brand of Thomism seems not to place the essence of religious faith in a sense of duties to others but instead in the individual's solitary experience of Pascalian restlessness. Similarly, Lasch's call for a return to religion takes its bearings from the despair and melancholy which modern individuals feel (173). He regards that solitary experience of alienation as the surest foundation of

liberal freedoms, and he argues that "Submission to God makes people less submissive in everyday life" (quoted on 173). Lawler writes that Lasch's work points "toward Thomism as the authentic postmodernism" (174), and he elsewhere characterizes Percy as a "contemporary Thomist or Tocquevillian" (106). This last formulation, however, is extremely puzzling, for it seems to gloss over the fact that whereas Tocqueville emphatically affirmed the justice of democracy and praised the separation of church and state, Saint Thomas argued for limited monarchy, the establishment of religion, and the legislation of morality.[27] Consequently, at this point it may be fair to stop and ask whether the Christian political ideas to which Lawler seeks to return might be more liberalized than authentic Thomism. Or to put the question another way, how can any kind of Thomism give a principled defense of modern democracy?

LIMITED GOVERNMENT AND THE BIBLE

In an earlier work which tries to elucidate the essentials of a Christian democratic politics, Lawler argues that human liberty "has a worthy foundation not in the modern impetus toward freedom from suffering and other forms of necessity, but in freedom for the duties of the creature to his or her Creator" (Lawler 1994, 4).[28] Modern democracy, he therefore insists, can be reconceived as something fundamentally Christian, and it can retain its core liberal principles (such as limited government and the separation of church and state) even while redefining freedom Thomistically in terms of duties rather than

[27] Cf. *Democracy in America* I.2.9 and II.4.8 with *Summa Theologica* I-II, Q. 90, A. 3; I-II, Q. 95, A. 1; and II-II, Q. 10, A. 8.

rights. This is because the origins of modern democracy, in his opinion, are not ultimately rooted in Enlightenment rationalism. Those who regard the Declaration of Independence simply as a Lockean document, he insists, espouse an "extreme view" which fails to consider the possibility that the American founders revolted "against the Christian tradition while retaining certain presuppositions derived from Christian experience" (7). For even if they did accept Locke's rationalistic teaching of natural rights, by affirming the egalitarian and trans-political dignity of the individual, he insists, they could not help but continue and even radicalize a tradition of political thought which is ultimately rooted in the Bible. "Christians discovered the experience of the dignity of the individual," Lawler writes, and they were also the first to claim that this dignity is enjoyed by all equally regardless of citizenship. Consequently, the Declaration's egalitarian view of human liberty is "decisively biblical and Christian" (7).

According to Lawler, the founders—or at least the majority of them—were not true Lockeans, and this is because they did "not understand political liberty fundamentally to be a means for the effective pursuit of power and wealth" (8). Indeed, even Jefferson believed that humans "have a natural inclination toward morality," and so he therefore actually unknowingly agreed with Thomas Aquinas (45). Thus, to the extent that the founders followed Locke at all, they followed only the "exoteric" Locke, the "superficially" Christian Locke (31), and not the true "Machiavellian" Locke (8) who teaches that human beings have no choice but to provide for themselves in a world without God (17). The Locke whom the founders knew claimed only to modify but not

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[28] Unless otherwise noted, all references over the next several pages come from this work.

to reject the Christian Natural Law tradition (31). Indeed, Lawler even goes so far as to speculate that because of this, and because they remained deeply moralistic in the cause of liberty, even the most free-thinking of the founders may have remained somehow unselfconsciously or inchoately religious (31). But if that is the case, it would seem to follow that their self-understanding, and with it, that of the regime which they created, must inevitably be of a less than clear-sighted character. For if the founders followed only the outward, rhetorical, half-Christian presentation of a philosopher who claimed to continue but actually broke with the medieval Natural Law tradition, how can Lawler also claim that the principles of the Declaration constitute that tradition's logical culmination or fulfillment?

Lawler's evidence for this, as we have already seen, is that the modern, egalitarian view of human dignity—the view which is inherent in but not sustained by the Lockean idea of natural rights—"points to and ultimately depends on the Christian experience of personal transcendence" (7). Because the idea of human individuality is a Biblical and Christian discovery, it follows, in the words of Vatican II's *Dignitatis Humanae*, that "the right to religious freedom" is based on this idea of dignity and that it is known through both reason and revelation (quoted on 18). Now of course, the words "religious freedom" never occur in the Bible, and so it would seem necessary to ask at this point whether Lawler's understanding of the Christian tradition might not reflect a confusion similar to the one which he attributes to the founders. For even as he presents the founders as less than clear-sighted about what they were doing, he also presents the polity which they created as continuing a Christian tradition that pre-dates Vatican II by

centuries. For example, he claims that Madison included religious opinions "concerning one's duties to God" under the heading of property in *Federalist 10* (8-9), and that in so doing he appealed "to the 'Thomistic' principle that each human being has the personal responsibility freely to seek the good" (9). Thus, as he writes, because liberalism "frees the Church, the academy, and the family from political control," it provides for the political realization of this Thomistic promise. According to his account, modern democracy's characteristic refusal to legislate morality or correct belief effectively liberates human beings for the pursuit of the "transcendent personal striving" which constitutes the meaning and purpose of their existence (9), and it thereby also permits them to seek out and achieve their spiritual fulfillment to a much greater extent than was possible under the established churches of the Middle Ages.

Now, in response to this argument, it would seem reasonable to assert that Jefferson and Madison in fact viewed freedom of conscience as a measure *against* orthodox Christianity. In the last letter that Jefferson ever wrote, he conveyed his hope that the Declaration's promise of "the free right to the unbounded exercise of reason and freedom of opinion" would once and for all arouse men "to burst the chains" of "monkish ignorance and superstition."[29] Since Thomas Aquinas spoke nowhere of a right to religious freedom, but instead supported the institution of religiously-based and even theocratic law, is not his thought perhaps *the* prime example of the kind of illiberal, irrational, and "monkish" political order which Jefferson had in mind? To see how Lawler seeks to avoid this seeming tension, it will be helpful to turn to a brief analysis of

[29] Jefferson to Roger C. Weightman, June 24, 1826 (Jefferson 1984, 1517).

his more practical view of the Constitution. He finds the beginnings of this view in the anti-Federalist Aristocrotis, who claimed that the original Constitution's failure to acknowledge God's sovereignty and its prohibition on religious tests for office would remove religion as a potential check on governmental power (25-6). Because "Aristocrotis was right" to recognize that in the absence of religion there can be no supports for human dignity and no limits to what is possible or permissible, Lawler insists that liberty in today's democracy needs to be re-conceived "as the freedom to decide how to discover and to do one's duty to one's Creator" (32). Freedom of religion, in other words, should be seen as freedom *for* religion, and the religion clauses of the First Amendment should therefore be seen as corrections to the secular deficiencies of the original Constitution which were intended to introduce "some partisanship on behalf of religion" (32-3).

That partisanship, according to Lawler, is what serves to endow liberty with a positive and ennobling but also restricted purpose (33-4). But here again one is compelled to ask whether this idea of positive liberty is really coherent, especially when it is applied to freedom of conscience. How can liberty of thought co-exist with—or rather, be the same as—a duty to carry out religious obligations—i.e. with a duty to *believe*? Now, Lawler finds an articulation of this view of liberty in the work of Richard John Neuhaus, and it will be useful to turn briefly to Neuhaus to judge how coherently its parts fit together. Like Lawler, Neuhaus discovers the origins of democracy in Christianity (Neuhaus 1984, 94-5), and he celebrates the Catholic Church's acceptance of the principle of religious freedom after Vatican II as a development which freed it from

its previous authoritarianism and thus finally allowed it to come into its own (Lawler 1994, 144-5). But at the same time, he also vociferously attacks the modern, negative understanding of liberty—which regards Christian teaching as "optional"—as "inappropriate for persons with dignity" (ibid., 146-7). Human dignity and the preservation of liberty—including presumably religious liberty—thus requires an answer to "the question of what freedom is *for*"(Neuhaus 1984, 92, emphasis original), and Neuhaus finds that answer in the duties which he claims are prescribed by an informal American religious establishment—a second constitution composed not of governmental powers but of shared beliefs and mores which are nonetheless *publicly* authoritative.

Neuhaus discovers this unwritten constitution in a long tradition spanning from the Founding to Lincoln's speeches to the Supreme Court's former interpretation of the First Amendment (ibid., 100-3), and he also claims that it is currently being resuscitated by a religious revival in the heartland (ibid., 93). This tradition holds that we Americans are a religious people who regard faith not as a private matter but as an ideal of justice—"a righteousness not of human devising" which orients politics towards "a transcendent good"(ibid., 105). Moreover, as Neuhaus insists, this understanding of religious freedom could not be more opposed to the Enlightenment's teaching that society springs from a contract "in which disinterested and traditionless individuals strike a deal and call it justice" (ibid., 105). Because that tradition understands religious freedom negatively, as a liberation from transcendent moral obligations, it inculcates an "indifference to normative truth" which begins a slide toward popular relativism. It culminates in the idea that a pluralistic society must "count all opinions about morality as equal . . . because we

are agreed there is no truth by which judgment can be rendered. The result is the debasement of our public life by the exclusion of the idea—and consequently of the practice—of virtue" (ibid., 111-2).

But even though Neuhaus attacks the Enlightenment, it is not so clear whether his claim that the Christian God is "*the* God of democratic equality and freedom" (Lawler 1994, 153, emphasis original) can avoid showing some signs of having been influenced by that same "traditionless" understanding of human nature which he criticizes. For even Lawler admits that Neuhaus' thoughts in this regard are based more on democratic moral conviction than on Scriptural interpretation: his belief in a liberal and egalitarian view of human dignity springs from an "orthodoxy or 'conviction' that exists prior to reason" (ibid., 160). Thus, for example, he attacks those who demand evidence for the Declaration's "self-evident" claim about equality for their refusal to grasp what he regards as an undeniable but indemonstrable first principle (Neuhaus 1984, 87), and he is similarly suspicious of the Catholic Natural Law tradition because he believes "that every attempt to root human morality or purpose in nature is inherently elitist," and he views its history "as intertwined with the Church's pre-Vatican II anti-democratic and anti-liberal ecclesiological pretensions" (Lawler 1994, 160). But because he thus rejects Natural Law, he also dismisses the Thomistic view that a good polity must make use of the law to inculcate virtue. Indeed, he argues that the Constitution had a "Christian inspiration" precisely because it did no such thing. On the contrary, the founders' "reluctance to prescribe the methods of 'political education' to inculcate virtue" can be attributed to "their awareness that such education tends to hide the truth of the person from himself"

(Lawler 1994, 151). He thus appears to ascribe to the founders a highly liberalized or personalized Christian outlook—an outlook which stresses not so much a sense of religious duty and a concern for doctrinal orthodoxy but instead the individual's deeply felt need to "be recognized in his concrete particularity by a personal God." Only "biblical-Christian theology," he argues, "understands fully the significance of the person's consciousness of his particular existence and his concern for his particular fate" (ibid.).

Because an individual's ultimate fate concerns only himself, Neuhaus seems to suggest, the state by right should leave him free to discover his own religious duties. Now, this happens to be one of the most important arguments that can be found in Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*. But as previously noted, Neuhaus most emphatically denies that he is endorsing Locke's brand of liberalism. On the contrary, he wishes for religious duties to be duties in the traditional sense, that is, obligations which are not created by the individual for himself but which come from outside and even demand great sacrifices. He and Lawler both seem to be attracted to two opposing visions of political society: a liberal one which regards human beings as autonomous possessors of rights—including the right to live and to *think* as they wish—and a pre-modern one in which government is not created by the people but ordained by God and in which the self is not autonomous but endowed with certain obligations, including the obligation to accept doctrinal orthodoxy. Alarmed by the spiritually stultifying effects of modern individualism, Lawler and Neuhaus look to religious tradition to re-invigorate liberalism with an understanding of virtue that calls upon citizens to make sacrifices in

the name of something greater than themselves, but they also remain attached at a deep moral level to the same liberal-democratic regime which leaves men on their own to pursue their good as they see fit—so much so that they even present that regime as the fullest manifestation of the Christian God's justice.

Lawler tries to reconcile these opposing visions by arguing that liberalism is good because its permissiveness leaves individuals and churches free to discover and perform their duties to God: it guarantees religion "the full freedom to achieve its own proper task of the spiritual liberation of man" (Lawler 1994, 139). He and Neuhaus both seem to trust that if left free to do as they choose human beings will for the most part choose right. But the arguments against negative liberty which they both espouse and the very powerful critiques of modern individualism which they present would seem to be powerful evidence that they themselves cannot entirely accept this. Indeed, a great part of the Christian tradition to which they appeal held that if left free human beings, because they are fallen beings, would inevitably pursue profit and pleasure rather than virtue. For this reason, Thomas Aquinas and other pre-modern thinkers taught that the ideal Biblical regime was not democracy but an illiberal aristocracy which uses the full force of the law to inculcate moral virtue and religious orthodoxy. So, to put this problem another way, it would seem that Lawler and Neuhaus display a deep moral attachment to a liberal regime that leaves men on their own, but they also accept the Thomistic view according to which a regime's justice depends on its capability to instill virtue in the citizenry. But if liberalism is not the most effective regime at doing this, then these thinkers would have to jettison one of these two views and either accept democracy—and therewith the spiritual

diminution they abhor—or consider that an illiberal regime, by virtue of its capacity to lead humans to perform their duties to their Creator, would be by virtue of that very fact superior to it.

A CONTEMPORARY RETURN TO ORTHODOXY

To gain greater clarity about what is at issue here, it may be helpful to turn to an author who has articulated that "extreme view" about the character of the American regime which Lawler criticizes. Robert P. Kraynak has elaborated a provocative critique of the Enlightenment which is intended to show that liberalism threatens to bring about a spiritual and intellectual decline precisely because its fundamental precepts are wholly opposed to Christian understandings of politics. Contemporary religious thinkers, he writes, are correct to say that democracy needs Christianity to ground its "deepest moral claims . . . about the innate worth and dignity of every individual" (Kraynak 2001, xii),[30] but their insistence that the Christian teaching on human dignity sanctions a liberal conception of justice is the result of a confusion which causes them to read "notions like democracy and human rights" (xiii) into the Bible. Because they are deeply attached to both Christianity and modern liberalism, they have not adequately reflected on the extent to which those two bodies of ideas oppose one another, and they have attempted, by hook or by crook, to fuse them "together in their hearts and minds" (7). Today's leading Christians, Kraynak challenges, expect the Christian teaching about human dignity to

[30] Unless otherwise noted, all references in this section come from this work.

serve as a check on liberal individualism, but as they interpret it, that teaching is itself liberal and individualistic, and it has thus been permeated by the very same ideas it is meant to restrain.

Kraynak's central thesis, which, as he alleges, his fellow Christians have failed to appreciate, is that "*modern liberal-democracy needs God, but God is not as liberal or as democratic as we would like Him to be*" (xiii, emphasis original). This becomes readily apparent once one appreciates the extent to which modern thought broke completely with the Biblical tradition and tried to establish a political order which was at its core secular and even atheistic. Kraynak's critique of the Enlightenment's ill effects on the human soul is also his attempt to refute the notion held by thinkers like Lawler and Neuhaus that the origins of modern democracy presuppose, even in some inchoate way, a continuation of the Christian tradition. It is true, he writes, that modern liberal thinkers propagated the egalitarian idea that every person has "inherent worth" (21), but they drew this insight not from Biblical sources but instead by denying "that objective knowledge of the highest good is possible to obtain" (xii). The most fundamental argument for the existence of liberal rights, Kraynak therefore insists, suffers from a deep-seated self-contradiction. Liberal philosophers "from Locke and Kant to Rorty and Rawls" have all inspired an idealistic "passion for justice" (18), but they have attempted to ground this on popularized skepticism and on the widespread belief that there are no natural or theological supports for human dignity (21). They tried, paradoxically, to show that precisely because "the universe is ordered by scientific laws that are indifferent to man" humans are free to "assert their own dignity by showing that they are autonomous beings

and masters of their fate" (21). To see what Kraynak has in mind here, one need only recall that John Locke's political arguments for natural rights in the *Second Treatise* and *A Letter Concerning Toleration* were accompanied, in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, by an endorsement of the relativistic position that there is no *summum bonum* in human life.[31]

As Kraynak summarizes the Enlightenment's thought, nature's indifference to our fate permits our "willful creations" to "take precedence as sources of human dignity or worth" (21-2). Such core moral absolutes as "individual rights and democratic consent" (21) therefore rest on the anti-Biblical understanding that humans have no duties to God, that they are free to do as they wish, and that there are no limits to what they can accomplish for themselves. Thus liberated, humans can now give attention to the goods properly of concern to them—to life, liberty, and property, goods which henceforward become the centerpiece of a new notion of rights. But these rights, now endowed with a sense of moral worth such that they are considered worth dying for, are ultimately rooted in a conception of liberty which is entirely negative because it is founded on the idea that there is no s*ummum bonum* to which humans must aspire (22). It is here, according to Kraynak, that liberal thought reveals itself to be ultimately self-undermining, for a purely negative conception of liberty can never provide the basis for such sacrifice or devotion. As early as Locke, who inspired our modern ideas of democratic freedom but who also claimed "that there is no essential trait . . . that clearly distinguishes human beings from

[31] See *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.21.55.

the other animals" (32),[32] the modern school of natural right is "at cross-purposes with itself, exalting and debasing man from one moment to the next" (32). As the centuries proceeded, according to Kraynak, subsequent modern thinkers radicalized Locke's paradox and made ever greater demands for dignity combined with even more extreme declarations of doubt. Finally, this problematic line of thinking reached its apex in the anti-foundationalism of thinkers like "Rorty, Dworkin, Ackerman, and Rawls" (35)—all of whom deny the possibility of any kind of "foundation for justice" all the while incoherently insisting upon "an absolute moral imperative to treat all people with equal concern and respect" (36).

According to Kraynak, this last incarnation of modernity's "strange mixture of nihilism and moralism" (36) has finally brought about the spiritually inferior society which was latent in the democratic project from its beginning. This, he argues, is most visibly apparent in a set of "weaknesses and anxieties" which currently pervade the West (10) and which can be attributed to the moral relativism which thinkers like Rawls and Rorty have spread "to the general public under the banner of enlightened thinking" (xii). Since the most common argument now given to defend democracy "derives from moral relativism" and praises its permissiveness, it is no wonder that "most political leaders and citizens" are unsure of liberalism's purpose and "uncertain about how to defend its fundamental principles" (10). And this lethargy, in turn, has had profoundly deleterious effects on our society. Liberalism has certainly eradicated the economic "misery and degradation" (28) of the pre-modern age, but it has also replaced a high culture that

[32] Kraynak's reference is to *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* II.27.10.

aspired "to spiritual, philosophical, artistic, and heroic greatness" with a popular one "dedicated to the mundane pursuits of ordinary people" (27). As a result, what we witness today is a society which lacks any kind of deep meaning or purpose, "a society dominated by the prosaic activities of material production and consumption, usually in the sterile atmosphere of an urban office building and impersonal suburb, where the chief concerns of people are economic security and status, bourgeois creature comforts, and physical health" (Kraynak 28). Therefore, although modern democracy ostensibly leaves citizens free to pursue whatever way of life they wish, the vast majority can be counted on to make an identical choice. What the unrestricted liberty that democracy grants to each "leads to most of the time," in the words of Ernest Fortin, is neither "a noble dedication to some pre-given ideal, nor a deeper religious life, nor a rich and diversified society, but easygoing indifference and mindless conformism" (quoted on 29).

Far from endorsing the right-wing populism of a Lasch or a Neuhaus, then, Kraynak makes no attempt to conceal the anti-democratic character of his argument. Although he certainly has great respect for some of democracy's accomplishments, he frankly admits that his first loyalties lie with a Christian tradition which holds that political hierarchy and illiberal penal laws are absolutely indispensable requirements for the cultivation of religious virtue. A large part of his book consists of a tour through the Bible and the Christian theological tradition which endeavors to show that Scripture's understanding of political life could not be more opposed to that of liberal-democracy. He shows, for example, that the Covenant Theology of the Hebrew Bible "is undemocratic" (46), for while the Book of Exodus does contain a narrative of national

liberation, that liberation is carried out "for the purpose of putting on the yoke of the law in the polity of Moses" (48). The intrusive penal law of the Old Testament regulates "all aspects of religious, personal, and social life" (49) because it is rooted in the recognition that man's fallen nature will lead most with the freedom to choose not to choose virtue. It seeks "to make the Israelites a holy people like their holy God . . . and holiness demands severe punishments" (49). In a similar fashion, although the New Testament contains an egalitarian spiritual message favoring "the poor and the humble over the rich and the powerful" (52), according to Kraynak this should not be misconstrued as support for democracy. On the contrary, precisely because the Gospel gives priority to salvation in the next world, its message of "inner freedom" is perfectly compatible "with obedience to external political authority, even with political oppression" (53).

Now, in Kraynak's estimation, because the overwhelming majority of contemporary Christians have lost sight of this, because they have secularized the Bible's idea of human dignity by equating it with a support for democracy and human rights in this world, they have infused their faith with the very tendencies which they would also like it to counterbalance. In so doing, they have not only undercut "the political utility of religion" (168), but they have also given religious authority to a "skeptical and subversive" line of thinking which is antithetical to the very idea of religious duty (169). As an antidote to this, Kraynak advocates what he admits will be a "difficult and unpopular" position (169), namely that the whole idea of rights—and with it, the entire liberal understanding of justice—should simply be jettisoned. Since rights are founded on skepticism and "conceptions of autonomous freedom" (169), they liberate self-love

and the appetites of "our fallen nature" (171). They cause the body to triumph over the soul, and they "eventually swallow up higher ends and subvert all higher authorities, including the churches and theologians who defend them while trying to avoid their negative side effects" (171). Indeed, as he writes, even attempted half-way houses such as so-called positive or restricted rights will not "lead people to a sense of gratitude and duty to God" because their "deep premise" remains "the autonomous self—the belief that man is born free and can determine his own destiny without being dependent upon others or beholden to higher powers" (172).

As a replacement for rights, Kraynak proposes something he calls "limited government under God" (185) or "constitutionalism without liberalism" (267)—a vision of political life which accepts the realities of modern democracy on prudential grounds but which in its key principles is fundamentally hostile to it. This vision holds that government "is instituted by God" and not, as the Declaration of Independence and Constitution assert, by consent of the people (184). It maintains that "the obligation to obey political rulers is a religious duty" (184), and it therefore completely overturns the separation of church and state. After all, the modern notion of an unconditional "right to religious freedom" relegates "the One True Religion" to the status of a mere private association and in so doing gives error "the same rights as the ultimate, cosmic truth" (179). Error of course can be tolerated "as a matter of prudence" (179), but in principle Kraynak's state espouses a Thomistic vision of political life which rejects freedom of conscience and takes an active hand in leading human beings "upward toward virtue and piety" (184)—i.e. towards correct belief.

The foremost task of Kraynak's state will therefore be to shape "the characters and souls of citizens" by instilling in their minds a concern for "religious duties" and for "Christian orthodoxy" (189). This illiberal aim of course requires hierarchy rather than democracy, and so Kraynak proposes strengthening potential aristocratic elements in American society such as "undemocratic religious traditions, the social leadership of upper classes, elite institutions of higher learning, and patriarchal authority figures," all of which once "served as checks on the irresponsible freedom and equality of a mass democracy" (238). More specifically, a return to a more authentically Christian political order requires placing restraints on capitalism (242), returning prayer to public schools, and protecting "the Christian family"—a task which can be accomplished by outlawing homosexual marriage, promoting "prolife legislation," and making "divorce extremely difficult or nearly impossible" (221). The last of these will of course require placing "some curbs on contemporary feminism" in order to preserve "the divinely ordained and natural distinctions between men and women," but Kraynak is confident that it will be possible to dispel "the unspiritual idea . . . that motherhood and homemaking are unworthy tasks of modern educated women" (221).

As this brief summary of Kraynak's politics should hopefully make clear, many of his practical proposals would likely be unpalatable even to most religious conservatives who agree with his assessment of modernity's spiritually damaging character. Lawler, Neuhaus, and the leaders of the orthodox camp whose views Hunter catalogues may wish to outlaw abortion and same-sex marriage, but they also remain deeply attached to such fundamental liberal principles as human rights and religious

pluralism—as becomes evident when they speak of finding new foundations for democracy in a broad-based and doctrinally capacious "Judeo-Christian" consensus rather than in one specific brand of orthodoxy. Moreover, as Wolfe shows, large numbers of ordinary Americans who are either socially moderate or somewhat sympathetic to the Right do have serious concerns about the direction of popular culture, but they would almost certainly balk at Kraynak's assertion that doing something about it requires outlawing divorce and returning women to the home. But Kraynak's larger point, which our understandable reaction to his anti-democratic politics should not blind us to, is that conservatives who accept his analysis of modernity's problems cannot coherently also shy away from his aristocratic solution. If they reject the Enlightenment, he suggests, then they also cannot delude themselves into thinking that they can preserve the political order it created—and especially not by reading support for it into the Bible.

Kraynak's most important contribution, then, is to show that the vision of liberalism espoused by today's religious conservatives is fundamentally ridden with tensions. The praise of religious freedom (and perhaps also the de-emphasis of original sin) which is found in the work of Lawler and Neuhaus seems to owe much to the same Enlightenment outlooks which they also critique. Indeed, as we will see more clearly in the next two chapters, one important aspect of the Enlightenment's theological reforms consisted in an attempt to lay the basis for freedom of conscience by effectively reading out of the Bible any commandment to *believe*. By calling attention to the way in which the thought of leading Christian intellectuals has been unknowingly influenced by such Enlightenment teachings, Kraynak poses a challenge not only to them, but also to all

friends of liberalism. In the first place, although his critique of the whole modern tradition is bracing, one might object that it is also brief, polemical, and painted with a broad brush. Therefore, to discover the origins of the contemporary religious outlooks which he faults, and also to see whether his criticism of the moral and political thought of the Enlightenment is justified, it will be necessary to conduct an examination of those seventeenth century authors who helped to change the way the Bible is read. By turning first to Locke, whose arguments Lawler and Neuhaus both accept and criticize, we will be able to consider whether it is truly the case that liberalism's origins endowed it with an inescapable spiritual void. But even if we find that Locke's denial of a *summum bonum* leaves him vulnerable to Kraynak's criticism, it would seem that there remains an alternative foundation for liberalism in Spinoza, a thinker whom Kraynak never mentions, and who not only refuses to endorse a position of skepticism or relativism, but who also promises a truly high-aiming liberalism—a liberalism characterized by the flourishing of philosophy and high culture, by the presence of deep patriotism and civic virtue, and all within an atmosphere in which orthodox Biblical piety has been decisively undermined.

Secondly, Kraynak's attempted aristocratic revival would also seem to invite a consideration of Tocqueville, who wrote in large part to convince partisans of religion and aristocracy of the need to accept democracy. Tocqueville famously warned of the potentially dire effects which democracy could have on the human soul, but he also believed that religion could counteract that danger without at the same time fundamentally undermining basic liberal principles. Indeed, Tocqueville wrote at a time

which he famously proclaimed to be irreversibly democratic—a time in which arguments in favor of overturning democracy were bound to have little influence. For a very similar reason, Kraynak's illiberal arguments are considerably beyond the pale of what is politically acceptable in America today; aside from perhaps leading to disillusionment among a certain segment of the population, it is hard to see what practical influence they could have. But that disillusionment, that loss of confidence in the meaning and purpose of our liberal democracy, would be by no means trivial. Indeed, the loss of confidence which Kraynak himself so ably describes as characteristic of today's society would appear to be a symptom of the near-universal rejection of Enlightenment principles which is now characteristic not only of the Right, but of the Left and the Center as well. For this political situation, which is not so different from the one that was present in the nineteenth century, attention to Tocqueville's friendly critique of the Enlightenment would seem to be most useful. For even while rejecting as unhealthy many of the key insights of modern political rationalism, and even while noting the great spiritual despair—and even the inclination for suicide—which gripped individuals in modern democracy, Tocqueville warned of the dangers of aristocratic revival, and he drew from his observations of America the hope to develop a new political science that could re-instill democracy with a spiritual aim and purpose.

RAWLS' PROGRESSIVIST LIBERALISM: DEMOCRACY AS RADICAL PLURALISM

The thought of the progressive Left, as we have seen it expressed in ordinary political discourse, rejects both traditional religion and the rationalism of the Enlightenment because it is deeply suspicious that all absolutist claims are incompatible with democratic pluralism. This conception of political life understands liberalism chiefly a regime of diversity which gives individuals and groups the freedom to pursue whatever moral visions give meaning and purpose to their lives. Because liberalism, so the thought goes, aims to foster the authentic development of a multitudinous variety of conflicting and incommensurable moral notions, it cannot without self-contradiction attempt to ground itself on any foundational claims—for all such claims, it is alleged, necessarily stifle expressive liberty, seek coercively to mold a naturally occurring diversity into an artificial uniformity, and thus are inextricably linked to political authoritarianism. Among contemporary thinkers, perhaps no one gives a more elaborate and detailed articulation of this position than the later John Rawls. Having abandoned as unworkable and even as undemocratic the idea implicit in *A Theory of Justice* that liberalism should claim the loyalty of citizens on the basis of a shared "comprehensive" moral outlook, Rawls attempts in *Political Liberalism* to draw the blueprints for a "freestanding" democratic society which protects all the usual liberal freedoms without rooting itself in any philosophical foundations.

Rawls' opening premise is that "modern democratic society is characterized . . . by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (xvi).[33]

[33] Unless otherwise noted, all references in the remainder of this chapter section come from Rawls 2005.

Liberalism, he suggests, is in its essence a regime of moral diversity; its very purpose is the fostering and accommodation of difference, and so democratic citizenries are by definition "profoundly divided" among "religious, philosophical, and moral" worldviews which, despite their common "reasonableness," differ on *the* most fundamental points (xviii). Democratic political life is not just characterized by the usual sorts of disagreement but instead by "the most intractable struggles"—struggles which transcend the level of ordinary politics and are waged "for the sake of the highest things: for religion, for philosophical views of the world, and for different moral conceptions of the good" (4). Far from regrettable, however, this deep moral disagreement, Rawls insists, is but "the natural outcome of the activities of human reason under enduring free institutions" (xxiv). Because democracy, in essence, *is* pluralism, the moral conflict which it produces is inherent in the idea of liberalism itself—so much so that any conception of justice which tried to do away with it by asserting its own absolute moral claims "would not be liberal" (143).

Rawls thus insists that philosophical absolutism is inseparable from political absolutism: the idea that citizens should espouse a common "comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine" is inherently undemocratic because any such consensus "can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power" (37). Rawls terms this insight "the fact of oppression," and he maintains that even liberal and democratic comprehensive doctrines such as those of Kant and Mill, if allowed to govern society, will inevitably violate their own principles and mimic the Spanish Inquisition, whose occurrence "was not an accident" but a necessary consequence of the public insistence on

moral uniformity (37). The society which Rawls described in *A Theory of Justice*, he now maintains, suffered from precisely this defect: because it required that citizens "hold the same comprehensive doctrine," its argument relied on "a premise the realization of which its principles of justice rule out" (xl). A truly liberal society, Rawls now insists, must therefore be wholly inclusive, and to this end he now promises that because the conception of justice described in *Political Liberalism* will not assert the truth of its own principles, it can even peacefully incorporate the adherents of various "religious and nonliberal doctrines" (xlv) who reject them. Political liberalism, he writes, "is sharply different from and rejects Enlightenment liberalism." Because the latter "attacked orthodox Christianity" (1997, 804)—and did so, one might add, on account of Christianity's hostility to liberalism—it failed to realize its own principles. Genuine liberalism therefore, according to Rawls, should not be traced back to "an Enlightenment project" of secular rationalism (xviii) but instead to the aftermath of the European wars of religion (xxiv), when the adherents of violently conflicting and irreconcilable moral outlooks compromised with one another and recognized the "new social possibility" of a "pluralist society" which could incorporate all these views because it espoused none of them (xxv).

But if liberal-democracy arose by integrating all these conflicting doctrines without altering them in the least, it would seem reasonable to ask how it ever became so "harmonious and stable" (xxv). Rawls himself is somewhat taken aback by this: as he acknowledges at the beginning of his work, given the extent of moral conflict in today's pluralist democracies, it is "remarkable that . . . just cooperation between free and equal

citizens is possible at all" (4). But Rawls' project is not simply to explain how it is that citizens of today's democracies can get along, for he repeatedly insists that his vision of political life is not to be "a mere modus vivendi" (145). His society will not just be stable but instead stable "for the right reasons" (xxxvii). It will be a product not of compromise but of consensus, and the loyalty which citizens feel for it will be not utilitarian but "wholehearted" (xxxviii). If we had earlier taken Rawls' praise of democracy's radical moral divisions and his disavowal of any comprehensive claims on the part of the liberal state to imply that citizens should not remain attached to liberalism at a deep moral level, it now seems that this was a profound mistake. On the contrary, Rawls insists that his "political conception of justice"—which affirms the value of pluralism and a respect for citizens' reasonable comprehensive doctrines—is "itself a moral conception" which all citizens can affirm "on moral grounds"(147).

Even while denying that it is possible to have any kind of moral agreement within pluralist democracies, then, Rawls also insists that just such an agreement is possible—provided it is limited to the domain of the political. To see how Rawls attempts to avoid this seeming contradiction, it will be necessary to recall that the pluralism which he attributes to democratic societies is not "simple pluralism" (164) or "pluralism as such" (144) but "reasonable pluralism" (xviii)—a pluralism which, as previously noted, consists only of "reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (xvi). Now reasonable comprehensive doctrines, as Rawls appears to define them, are those which do "not reject the essentials of a democratic regime" (xvi). Unlike "unreasonable," "irrational," or "mad," comprehensive doctrines, which can only be contained "so that they do not undermine the

unity and justice of society" (xvi-xvii), reasonable comprehensive doctrines appear to have something innate in them which makes them amenable to democratic norms and principles. They, and not their unreasonable and illiberal counterparts, can compose the basis of an overlapping consensus which can claim the allegiance of citizens at a deep moral level. This is possible because in a society marked by *reasonable* pluralism citizens simultaneously espouse "both a comprehensive doctrine and the focal political conception," which are "somehow related" (xix). Each citizen in a Rawlsian polity, so the thought seems to be, will have a comprehensive doctrine which is primarily concerned with the "nonpublic" realm (220), but this in turn will support a conception of justice—an endorsement of basic liberal principles—which is limited to a distinct, political sphere. Because every reasonable comprehensive doctrine can be expected to support the overlapping consensus from its own point of view, citizens—whose primary loyalties lie with these doctrines—can endorse liberal-democracy with real moral conviction (11-12).

But if the moral conflict which characterizes modern democracy is carried out exclusively between reasonable views, and if reasonable views are primarily defined by their acceptance of basic liberal norms, is this conflict is really as dire as Rawls supposes? Indeed, what seems to set reasonable comprehensive doctrines apart from unreasonable ones in his thought is that the former accept their own nonpolitical status, and Rawls acknowledges that he can count on this because he finds it already present in liberal society. As he puts it, the "dualism in political liberalism" between the single "political conception" and the various (nonpolitical) "comprehensive doctrines" arises

not "from philosophy" but instead from "the special nature of democratic political culture as marked by reasonable pluralism" (xxi). Because democratic societies affirm a separation between the political and the nonpolitical, the reasonable comprehensive doctrines which are loyal to it also endorse that same separation. Contemporary Catholics, for example, are reasonable because, although they oppose abortion and decline to practice it among themselves, they nonetheless respect a right to it "as belonging to legitimate law." To do otherwise or to resist that law "with force . . . would be unreasonable," because "it would mean their attempting to impose their own comprehensive doctrine" on others who do not accept it (lv). Confining their moral reasoning merely to themselves, they deny a right to abortion solely to those who, it must be said, have voluntarily joined their fold (and could voluntarily leave it). They thus tacitly endorse the position of the liberal state that abortion (like religious belief or church-membership) is a personal choice, and their doctrine is reasonable because it holds that in cases where the law of that state conflicts with their deeply held religious tenets, it is the latter which must give way.

Reasonable pluralism as Rawls describes it may therefore divide citizens "deeply" (10), but only at the level of "the personal, the familial, and the associational" (10). When it comes to politics, the deep sources of meaning which so separate these competing worldviews can be set aside, and an overlapping consensus which endorses a common conception of justice can easily be discovered. This is because comprehensive doctrines belong to what Rawls calls "the 'background culture' of civil society. This is the culture of the social, not of the political. It is the culture of daily life, of its many

associations: churches and universities, learned and scientific societies, and clubs and teams, to mention a few" (14). Rawls thus seems to suggest that what is truly "of value in human life" and what gives citizens their deepest purposes and reasons for living, can be found in such nonpolitical attachments as friendship, family, and "associational relationships" (13). These "nonpolitical aims and commitments" (30) are so fundamental that without them "we would be disoriented and unable to carry on," and when they change—as they frequently do—"we are likely to say that we are no longer the same person" because we have acquired a new moral identity (31). But because they are merely associational, individuals remain free to adopt or reject them at their leisure without any corresponding change in their political status or civil rights. "On the road to Damascus Saul of Tarsus becomes Paul the Apostle. Yet such a conversion implies no change in our public or institutional identity" (31).

Now, this remarkable statement seems to invite the response that a conversion to Christianity under the Roman Empire was not as politically inconsequential as would be a conversion to or from any of the various religious sects which are peaceably incorporated into liberal society today. In assuming that religion is merely a nonpublic association,[34] and furthermore that the various churches, being 'reasonable,' view themselves that way, does not Rawls here presuppose something which is true of liberal-democracies but which was not so readily apparent in the societies which preceded them?

[34] Rawls uses the term 'nonpublic' rather than 'private' because he believes that "there is no such thing as private reason" (220 n.7). The underlying thought here seems to be that the reasoning employed by associations is still of a communal character. In this section I follow Rawls' usage, even though his terms 'nonpublic' and 'nonpolitical' seem to be more or less equivalent to what the Enlightenment sought to make 'private.'

To begin to grapple with this problem, it should first be observed that the comprehensive doctrines which will be included in Rawls' overlapping consensus all "respect the limits of, and serve a role within, the [liberal] political conception of justice" (176). As previously noted, what makes them reasonable is that they support liberal norms on their own terms. To this end, Rawls acknowledges that 'public reason'—the body of moral language which he will permit citizens to use when discussing their fundamental principles—is composed of "a family of political conceptions of justice" (1997, 773), but this family is only made up of "many liberalisms" (1997, 774). Followers of Locke, of Mill, of Kant, and of various tolerant and liberalized religious outlooks will all be able to contribute to it, but their disagreements will pale in comparison to their consensus on what Rawls frequently calls "matters of basic justice." They may argue with one another about how to interpret or "order, or balance" their "political principles and values," but they can do so only because at a deeper level they all "specify the same ones" (1997, 774).

REASONABLENESS AS AN ENLIGHTENMENT INHERITANCE

Rawls' original promise, of course, was that he would show how various conflicting liberal and illiberal comprehensive doctrines could give their support to liberal-democracy. In now admitting that, on the contrary, the deep divisions which characterize today's pluralist societies are in fact intramural ones between convinced liberal-democrats, he seems to reveal that he presupposes the moral agreement which he

was supposed to construct. As he acknowledges at the opening of his work, ideas about justice in modern democracies are actually quite uniform: "religious toleration is now accepted, and arguments for persecution are no longer openly professed; similarly, slavery, which caused our Civil War, is rejected as inherently unjust, and however much the aftermath of slavery may persist in social policies and unavowed attitudes, no one is willing to defend it" (8). Because basic liberal principles are universally assented to, Rawls writes that his only task will be to "collect such settled convictions" and on that basis to "try to organize the basic ideals and principles implicit in" them into "a coherent political conception of justice" (8). Rather than build a liberal consensus among various illiberal parties, he will look to the "shared fund of implicitly recognized ideas and principles" which are already present in our culture and then present these in a way that accurately reflects "our most firmly held convictions" (8). These convictions, to be sure, inevitably give rise to an "enduring controversy," but only over "the most appropriate understanding of liberty and equality" (9). On the desirability of those values themselves we are all already agreed.

Rawls, it therefore appears, is not actually manufacturing much of a moral consensus for liberal-democracy, since by appealing to one that already exists he implicitly invites to the bargaining table only those parties who already respect a regime of toleration.[35] Modern democracies, it therefore appears, are not actually so diverse after all, for when it comes to basic questions of justice, "in a well-ordered society supported

[35]Owen writes that "the capacity of people to come to an agreement despite their supposedly profound differences is not so amazing, since Rawls has from the outset included as parties to the discussion only

by an overlapping consensus," citizens' "political values and commitments . . . are roughly the same" (31-2). Indeed, it is precisely this deep agreement on political fundamentals that makes it unnecessary for Rawls to attempt to justify liberalism before an independent standard. Because the liberals who exclusively make up his audience are all agreed on certain fundamentals, he can say that he is only trying to put into order "our considered convictions" (26), or to articulate the "conception of justice" which is "most reasonable *for us*" (28, emphasis added). That conception will obviously be a liberal one because, as he tautologically states, "the most reasonable political conception of justice for a democratic regime will be, broadly speaking, liberal" (156). Because we are all convinced liberals and likely to remain so, we can be counted on to remain loyal to a liberal view which "removes from the political agenda the most divisive issues, serious contention about which must undermine the bases of social cooperation" (157). Our tradition presupposes that religion, for example, has been relegated to what Rawls calls the 'background culture' and thus that the principle of "liberty of conscience, which takes the truths of religion off the political agenda," is established (151). In a democratic regime, theological challenges to liberalism have joined arguments in favor of slavery and serfdom as matters which are simply considered beyond the pale of acceptable public discourse: "these matters are reasonably taken as fixed, as correctly settled once and for all. They are part of the public charter of a constitutional regime and not a suitable topic for ongoing debate and discussion" (151 n.16).

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those liberals who do not differ on the crucial political question at issue." As such, "Rawls's 'overlapping consensus' presupposes itself" (Owen 2001, 113-4).

Now Rawls, of course, does not simply regard this gag-rule as a historical inheritance. As he acknowledges, "that certain matters are reasonably taken off the political agenda does not mean that a political conception of justice should not provide the grounds and reasons why this should be done" (152). But in Rawls' overlapping consensus this task is left to the various comprehensive doctrines themselves, and so it would appear that if he is to count on their support he must in fact presuppose a certain historical inheritance in which only certain types of comprehensive doctrines exist. In particular, his thought would seem to require that the religious groups present in his polity view themselves as nonpublic associations and accordingly refrain from taking their claims of theological orthodoxy so seriously that they would deny freedom of conscience either to their own members or to outsiders. Rawls acknowledges that to be considered reasonable religions must endorse what he calls "an account of free faith," a doctrine which upholds the spiritual autonomy of the individual and accordingly permits him to seek his own salvation by choosing his church for himself (170). Rawls has few doubts, however, that "except for certain kinds of fundamentalism, all the main historical religions admit of such an account and thus may be seen as reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (170).[36] After introducing the idea of this account of free faith, however, Rawls in a corresponding footnote explicitly associates it with Locke's *Letter Concerning Toleration*, and he points out seven of Locke's key conclusions which, taken together,

[36] It is true that Rawls cautions that he may be assuming this "too optimistically" (170). In a 1998 letter proposing revisions to *Political Liberalism*, however, he drops this note of qualification and confidently asserts that "Catholicism (since Vatican II)," along with "much of Protestantism, Judaism, and Islam," can all find a home in his polity: "I hold that, except for fundamentalism, they can support a constitutional democratic regime" (438).

establish the primacy of the individual conscience in theological matters and subordinate the church to secular authority and to the claims of reason.[37] Each of these claims were of course highly controversial in Locke's day, and Locke thus had to argue that they were not just reasonable in Rawls' sense but also true. Rawls, however, seems able to remain confident that what he calls fundamentalism will not pose much of a challenge to his project, and this is because the kind of religious believers whom Locke was arguing against have now largely disappeared. As Rawls himself acknowledges, the religious views which are dominant in today's liberal societies are no longer akin to those espoused by "Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century" (148). Because both of these faiths "held that it was the duty of the ruler to uphold the true religion and to repress the spread of heresy," toleration among them would have been "a mere modus vivendi" and subject to abandonment once the political situation changed (148). In order for real moral agreement on liberal principles to exist, Rawls acknowledges, views such as these had to be marginalized, and liberal society now remains harmonious and stable because the adherents of such salvationist religions "are very much in the minority, and are likely to remain so" (148).

Now of course, Rawls had opened the book by claiming that liberalism first arose when these two religions came to a common moral understanding which, however, also allowed them to preserve their most fundamental moral differences. What he now admits

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[37] These conclusions are: (1) "God has given no man authority over another;" (2) "no man can abandon the care of his salvation to the care of another;" (3) "the understanding cannot be compelled by force to belief;" (4) "the care of men's souls is not given to the magistrate as that would determine faith by where we were born;" (5) "a church is a voluntary society, and no man is bound to any particular church and he may leave it as freely as he entered;" (6) "excommunication does not affect civil relationships;" (7) "only faith and inward sincerity gain our salvation and acceptance with God" (145 n.12).

is that such a thing would have been impossible, and indeed, its very idea would seem to be incoherent. Instead, he implies that liberalism as we know it today is the beneficiary of a certain theological transformation which occurred sometime around the seventeenth century and which made Catholicism and Protestantism other than they once were. Both of these religions have now adopted Lockean theological outlooks according to which churches are but "associations" and are therefore akin in their political status, it must be said, to the likes of "universities, scientific societies and professional groups" (220). "In a democratic society," Rawls writes, "the authority of churches over their members" is "freely accepted" (221). Understanding this, modern religious denominations recognize the liberty of individuals to make up their own minds on theological questions, to seek their salvation wherever they judge best, and thus to enter or leave congregations freely: "Whatever comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral views we hold are . . . freely accepted, politically speaking; for given liberty of conscience and freedom of thought, we impose any such doctrine on ourselves" (222). The worst sentence that a church can pass is that of excommunication, but as Rawls notes (while drawing on Locke), this effects no change in the civil rights of the one who is excommunicated (145 n.12). In short, modern churches most characteristically recognize that they have no right to command citizens in the same way that the state does, for "as free and equal citizens," to decide whether we accept church teachings "is regarded as within our political competence specified by basic constitutional rights and liberties." "By contrast, the government's authority cannot be evaded except by leaving the territory over which it governs, and not always then" (222).

To make the nature of this theological inheritance a bit clearer, it will be helpful to consider the strain that Rawls' professed neutrality begins to face as he confronts the following very powerful objection: "Certain truths, it may be said, concern things so important that differences about them have to be fought out, even should this mean civil war" (151). Such an objection has much in common with the kinds of religious claims which the Enlightenment argued against. Since a regime of toleration, so the thought goes, legitimizes heresy and idolatry in principle, is it not worth destroying, even at the risk of great amounts of bloodshed? After all, how can we be sure that the temporal good of civil peace should be preferred to the heavenly bliss of salvation, especially when it is our duty to love our neighbors and therefore not to allow them to put their souls in jeopardy by falling into error? Thomas Hobbes, in a chapter entitled "Of What is Necessary for a Man's Reception into the Kingdom of Heaven," noted that the "most frequent pretext of sedition and civil war" has to do with the unresolved difficulty of when one should obey God and when one should obey one's civil sovereign. Because nothing on earth can possibly compare with the joys or the pains of another life, it would obviously be "madness," says Hobbes, to obey man over God when doing so carries the risk of "being damned to eternal death" (*Leviathan* xliii.1-2). To secure allegiance to the secular state, the philosophers of the Enlightenment had to show not only that salvation does not demand that we change our neighbors' religious opinions, but indeed, as Locke argued in *A Letter Concerning Toleration*, that to attempt do so by force places one's soul in danger of perdition. To quell the civil wars of their own time, in other words, these thinkers had to provide an answer to the question posed in Hobbes' chapter title and

weigh in on matters theological. Rawls, on the other hand, can only tell us that religions which claim that the "values of salvation and eternal life" outweigh the "worldly values" of liberal politics are all by definition unreasonable (1997, 801-2).

But of course, that a particular viewpoint is unreasonable does not necessarily make it false, and still less does it make it politically inconsequential. Rawls thus needs to acknowledge the potential existence of what he calls "the apparent paradox of public reason"—a dilemma which holds that it is neither reasonable nor rational for citizens not to look to "the whole truth as they see it" when that truth conflicts with the liberal state's conception of justice (216). If a member of an illiberal religious sect believes that his duty to God demands that he forcibly convert those who do not share his views, how can he be expected to drop this demand simply because the liberal regime regards such behavior as unjust? For Rawls, this problem is solved only because there are no such believers in his polity. As he writes, "when the political conception is supported by an overlapping consensus of *reasonable* comprehensive doctrines, the paradox of public reason disappears" (218, emphasis added). Because the only religions which endorse his overlapping consensus sanction freedom of conscience on theological grounds and have thus "adapted to the conception of justice" he describes (219), religious intolerance is simply not the problem for Rawls that it was for the Enlightenment thinkers. The account of free faith which Locke provided has indeed transformed all the major Christian religions and permitted them to endorse liberal principles, and Rawls can therefore safely count on an ecumenical theological uniformity which was created for him by his predecessors. But considering that Rawls' state will refuse on principle to make any

substantive theological claims, it would seem in a poor position not only to justify those claims before outsiders, but also to encourage a truly zealous devotion to the cause of toleration on the part of its own citizens.

CIVIC EDUCATION AND THE IMPOSSIBILITY OF STATE NEUTRALITY

At this point, then, it would appear that Rawls' polity faces the following difficulty. Despite his insistence to the contrary, his regime of radical diversity actually seems to be characterized by an underlying uniformity—a uniformity which has been bequeathed to contemporary society by the same Enlightenment rationalism which he has claimed to reject on account of its intolerance towards orthodox religion. But since Rawls too will not admit truly orthodox believers into his polity, that polity can neither justify that exclusion nor provide a foundation for the deep moral commitment to liberal-democracy which its citizens, as he assumes, will feel. Now of course, it might be assumed, as Rawls had first led us to believe, that this is not such a problem, for each comprehensive doctrine, as we recall, is supposed to inspire a moral confidence in the justice of liberal principles on the strength of its own authority. But as Rawls continues, he begins to indicate that these nonpublic viewpoints are actually quite weak. Qualifying his earlier description of the overlapping consensus, Rawls now writes that in actual political life, "the allegiance to a principle of political justice" rarely depends upon "the knowledge of or the belief in its derivation from a comprehensive view" (159-60). What is more important, he insists, is that that conception of justice be seen by citizens as

"reasonable in itself" or "as part of a pluralist view" (160), reasonableness and respect for pluralism having much the same meaning to Rawls. Most people in liberal society, he therefore seems to suggest, are actually not that firmly attached to their comprehensive doctrines, nor have they really reflected all that much upon them, but they *are* firm in their moral attachment to a regime of toleration. "In everyday life," Rawls writes, "we have not usually decided, or even thought much about," how our comprehensive doctrines relate to the political conception. "Most people's religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines are not seen by them as fully general and comprehensive," and there "is lots of slippage, so to speak" (160). Comprehensive doctrines are highly malleable, and people generally choose them without thinking much about what they have to say about politics: "Should an incompatibility later be recognized between the principles of justice and their wider doctrines, then they might very well adjust or revise these doctrines rather than reject those [liberal] principles" (160).

But if the political realm is authoritative in this way, and if citizens are more deeply attached to the liberal regime than they are to their various nonpublic associations, then that regime would appear to face the need to assert itself and to make exactly the kinds of absolute moral claims which Rawls would have it eschew. Since liberal-democracy, as he acknowledges, tends to make "citizens' comprehensive views reasonable if they were not so before" (163-4), it would seem bound to engage in exactly that kind of moral and cultural formation which Rawls would like to avoid. But it may very well do this not through the oppressive use of state power, as Rawls had earlier implied, but through more gentle and less noticeable ways. Thus, even if they are not

officially outlawed, intolerant religious views will likely "cease to exist" in Rawls' society for the obvious reason that they will fail to gain adherents among a citizenry that is attached to contrary principles (196-7). But as he also acknowledges, such an occurrence would not be simply coincidental, for the liberal regime will necessary also lay down authoritative "constraints to which all churches and associations are subject" (1997, 789). Although Rawls is certainly willing to tolerate a certain amount of anti-democratic behavior *within* churches if their members consent to it—as found, say, in Catholicism's refusal to ordain female priests—that is as far as his acceptance of illiberal religion can extend. In their external behavior, Rawlsian churches will have no choice but to respect the tenets of liberalism. If they do otherwise they will be acting unreasonably, and if they *teach* otherwise their loyalty to liberalism will not be for the right reasons. As Rawls admits, the regime of rights which is the hallmark of liberal society is all-encompassing; if it is to have any force, it must penetrate every area of life and govern the behavior even of individuals: "If the so-called private sphere is alleged to be a space exempt from justice, then there is no such thing" (1997, 791).

Now, this deeply moralistic assertion seems quite at odds, to say the least, with Rawls' original anti-foundationalist premises. He is now forced to admit quite explicitly not only that the liberal state requires moral uniformity, but also that it must create that uniformity by favoring certain comprehensive outlooks at the expense of others. But since Rawls' opening premise was that any such behavior is by definition illiberal and undemocratic, he has to ask himself whether the effective exclusion of these illiberal comprehensive doctrines is unfair to them. "Is the political conception," he asks,

"arbitrarily biased against these views" (197)? His answer, however, is powerful and direct: it is not unfair to them because "social influences favoring some doctrines over others cannot be avoided by any view of political justice. No society can include within itself all forms of life" (197). Rawls wrings his hands and laments "the limited space, as it were, of social worlds," but he ultimately concedes that no polity can avoid the need to "exclude some ways of life that realize in special ways certain fundamental values" (197). Rawls therefore finds that he must do what he said he would not do and place a limit upon pluralism, and as he continues he also seems to go further and to suggest that this restriction will not simply be arbitrary, or based solely upon what "we" prefer, but will in fact require that the liberal state make certain theological claims.

What if, for example, there are illiberal elements in the background culture which pose a challenge to fundamental liberal principles? In a very revealing passage, Rawls admits that in such a case the democratic state may have to assert that the views of its adversaries are not just unreasonable in his sense but also false. In "affirming a political conception of justice," he writes, "we may eventually have to assert at least certain aspects of own comprehensive religious or philosophical doctrine" (152).

> This will happen whenever someone insists, for example, that certain questions are so fundamental that to insure their being rightly settled justifies civil strife. The religious salvation of those holding a particular religion, or indeed the salvation of a whole people, may be said to depend on it. *At this point we may have no alternative but to deny this, or to imply its denial and hence to maintain the kind of thing we had hoped to avoid* (152, emphasis added).

In times of crisis, or when forced to mount a principled defense of its own freedoms, Rawls' state must abandon its professed neutrality. When religious believers assert that a

concern for salvation justifies curtailing citizens' liberty of conscience, the Rawlsian state will oppose them. In so doing, it will try, as far as it can, to refrain from making references to any comprehensive doctrine, but as Rawls plainly admits, "Of course, we do not believe the doctrine believers here assert, and this is shown by what we do" (153). As Owen points out, "This final admission is explosive. For since the liberal state must act, and since it cannot take any religious prescription as authoritative for its actions, the liberal state *in principle* denies that there are any true, politically relevant religious prescriptions. Liberalism rests on a theological premise" (Owen 2001, 119, emphasis original). That premise, indeed, involves an answer to *the* most important question as concerns man's relationship to God, namely that of what is or is not required in order to gain entrance to the kingdom of heaven. As Rawls admits, "our actions" which we take to defend the liberty of conscience "imply that *we believe the concern for salvation does not require anything incompatible with that liberty*" (153, emphasis added).

Rawls, then, seems to be reluctantly confronting the fact that politics is authoritative in a way that sits uneasily with his earlier assertions about how the deepest sources of human identity and meaning can be found in nonpublic, associational attachments. The liberal state, it now appears, provides authoritative answers to certain crucial questions. By shaping not just the moral but also the theological outlooks of citizens, it takes the leading role in the formation of human character. Rawls, as previously noted, acknowledges that liberal-democracies tend to make comprehensive doctrines reasonable and tolerant (36, 144), but he also goes so far as to suggest that a liberal regime may also need to "affirm the superiority of certain forms of moral

character and encourage certain moral virtues" (194). "Even though political liberalism . . . is neutral in its aim" (194), its need to promote the cultivation of certain kinds of comprehensive doctrines and discourage others justifies taking "reasonable measures" to "strengthen the virtues of toleration" (195), civility, reasonableness, and fairness (194). The Rawlsian state, it now appears, will not stop at imposing "restrictions on permissible comprehensive views;" it will go further and "inevitably encourage some ways of life and discourage others, or even exclude them altogether" (195). In particular, it will promote an ethic of civility, tolerance, and cooperation, and to this end, even if it denies doing any such thing, it will encourage the development of a liberal or bourgeois way of life marked by compromise, a sense of fair play, and a desire to get along with others. Such a way of life, of course, will not give serious importance to religious questions, but will likely tend to regard the often violent theological disputes of the past as tragic impediments to the more reasonable (and thoroughly this-worldly) goals of peace, security, good-neighborliness, and economic well-being.

Now Rawls is understandably troubled by his need to admit that his radically pluralist liberal state will need to encourage certain ways of life and discourage others. Unlike the thinkers of the Enlightenment, who saw this clearly but believed that this endeavor was called for by reason or natural right, Rawls has to ask "whether how it does this is just" (196)—that is, just in his pluralistic sense of the term. How can liberalism encourage and discourage certain comprehensive doctrines and ways of life while nonetheless refraining from taking any actions "intended to favor any particular comprehensive view" (196)? Has Rawls not here been forced into a simple

contradiction—a contradiction which not only undermines his promise to incorporate illiberal religious believers into his polity but which also reveals that that polity's diversity masks an underlying and altogether necessary moral uniformity? Indeed, what Rawls may not adequately consider is the way in which the commitment to pluralism itself creates a specific kind of homogeneity which centers around a common agreement on the benefits of diversity and which excludes those who deny this claim.

Perhaps nothing better illustrates this than Rawls' discussion of compulsory civic education. Rawls tries to concede as much as he can to parents who belong to religious sects which "oppose the culture of the modern world and wish to lead their common life apart from its influences" (199). He tries to draw a contrast between his own requirements for education and those of Kant and Mill, but on the fundamental point he nonetheless holds fast. Political liberalism, he writes, "will ask that children's education include such things as knowledge of their constitutional and civic rights so that, for example, they know that liberty of conscience exists in their society and that apostasy is not a legal crime" (199). Although Rawls tries to carve out as much room as possible for religious sects which oppose modernity, that cannot extend to a complete toleration of illiberal political teachings. These sects do not enjoy a total monopoly on the education of their children for the very simple reason that the liberal regime under which they live considers those children not as wholly subordinate to their parents but as autonomous beings with rights. Since among the most prominent of those rights is the liberty of conscience, the liberal regime must ensure that those children know when they come of age that they are free to decide for themselves which religious association they would like

to belong to, and this means that it must close down as unreasonable any religious school which would bring them up to believe otherwise.

Since the education he calls for is far from radically pluralist, then, Rawls must answer the sensible objection "that requiring children to understand the political conception in these ways is in effect, though not in intention, to educate them to a comprehensive liberal conception" (199). His response to this is to capitulate, though apologetically: "It must be granted," he writes, "that this may indeed happen in the case of some. And certainly there is some resemblance between the values of political liberalism and the values of the comprehensive liberalism of Kant and Mill" (200). To give children the choice between liberal and illiberal conceptions of political life is not a step that Rawls is willing to take; when his support for liberal-democracy comes into conflict with his support for pluralism, he recognizes that it is the latter which must give way. His professed openness to all ways of life is really an openness only to those ways of life which accept liberal principles, and considering that he has also admitted the relatively superficial character of liberalism's diversity, it may well be an openness only to a single way of life. Thus, although he would hesitate to express himself in these terms, his future citizens must be taught that liberal principles are true ones. "The unavoidable consequences of reasonable requirements for children's education," he writes, "may have to be accepted, often with regret" (200). To be sure, Rawls repeats, "Justice as fairness honors, as far as it can, the claims of those who wish to withdraw from the modern world in accordance with the injunctions of their religion, provided only that they acknowledge the principles of the political conception of justice and appreciate

its political ideals of person and society" (200). But of course, any reclusive sect which endorsed toleration, individual autonomy, and freedom of conscience would only apparently withdraw from the modern world; in the crucial, political sense, it would remain very much a part of it because it would accept the fundamental tenets of modern liberalism.

THE WEAKNESS OF RAWLSIAN LIBERALISM

Since the superficial diversity of Rawls' pluralism actually masks a deeper uniformity, the problem which his work is meant to solve is therefore not the "torturing question" (1997, 803) which he first pronounced it to be. Because the citizens of today's democratic regimes share a common allegiance to basic liberal principles, their differences are not so fundamental and their cooperation is not so surprising. At the same time that Rawls admits the need for this uniformity, however, his continuing endorsement of anti-foundationalism renders him unable to provide the robust moral defense of liberal-democracy which he can not help but acknowledge as necessary. Indeed, he goes out of his way to apologize for offering such a defense, and it is therefore tempting to wonder just how much confidence in liberal principles the recipients of a Rawlsian civic education would actually come away with. Since they would also be taught that appeals to moral absolutes are undemocratic, the students in a Rawlsian civics class would likely receive at best a half-hearted explanation of the virtues of their own political tradition—an explanation that would present that tradition as characterized chiefly by

nonjudgmentalism, that would regard its need to assert itself as at best a necessary evil, and that would therefore seem unlikely have the necessary tools at its disposal in those emergency situations when there really is a need to make comprehensive claims.

Rawlsian citizens would therefore be raised to look upon "the fundamental ideas of a democratic society" (40) as meaningful because of their communal character, that is, as a part of the heritage which "we" who are committed to them happen to share. But the kind of communal attachment to which Rawls appeals is hardly robust, since, after all, it springs from the same distrust of moral absolutism which leads him to defend only grudgingly—and therefore unsatisfactorily—those liberal principles to which he is so obviously attached. Thus, as previously indicated, in his reluctance to make any truth-claims he insists that his conception of justice "starts from within a certain political tradition" (1985, 225) and therefore can only describe and clarify, rather than justify, "what we now think" (26). Now, to be sure, Rawls says that political philosophy arises in response to "deep political conflicts" (45), and he imagines as an example of such a conflict a quarrel between Alexander Stephens and Abraham Lincoln over the South's principled defense of slavery. Remarkably, however, his account of this hypothetical conversation suggests that liberalism is incapable of defending its own principles of justice before an independent standard and thus that it cannot show the moral error even of a defender of a slave-society. "No political conception of justice," he writes, "could have weight with us unless it helped to put in order our considered convictions of justice at all levels of generality" (45). Now to be sure, Rawls would label doctrines such as Stephens' as 'unreasonable' or 'mad' and exclude them from his overlapping consensus,

but he could do so only on the basis of a pre-existing cultural agreement on the definitions of sanity. "Political philosophy," he comments in an extraordinary and surprising statement, cannot exist apart from traditions of "political thought and practice," and it therefore "cannot coerce our considered convictions any more than the principles of logic can" (45).

But one could of course respond to this with the obvious objection that the principles of logic can do precisely this. If, for example, a view which we hold dear is actually confused or self-contradictory, is it not the task of political philosophy, Socratically understood, to point out these tensions and to help us to find a more clear-sighted path? Rawls' brand of political philosophy, on the contrary, cannot oppose the moral convictions which it takes to be of primary importance in human life.[38] Simply put, Rawls seems to suppose that we are our prejudices—and unfortunately, his defense of liberalism turns out to be similarly dogmatic. Because it roots itself entirely within our current political tradition, political liberalism declines to engage the arguments of those who are not a part of that tradition. In what is perhaps his most lucid statement of this, Rawls again takes up the objection which a thinker like Kraynak might pose. Some "fundamentalist religious doctrines," he writes, "will reject the ideas of public reason and deliberative democracy" (1997, 805-6). Their adherents will "say that democracy leads to a culture contrary to their religion" and will "assert that the religiously true . . .

[38] See also Rawls' introductory remarks to his *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*: "Political philosophy has no special access to fundamental truths, or reasonable ideas, about justice and the common good, or to other basic notions. Its merit, *to the extent it has any*, is that by study and reflection it may elaborate deeper and more instructive conceptions of basic political ideas that help us to clarify our judgments about the institutions and policies of a democratic regime" (Rawls 2007, 1, emphasis added).

overrides the politically reasonable" (1997, 806). Rawls' response to these claims this time is not to engage them, much less to claim that they are misguided, but simply to assert that they can have no place in liberal society: "We simply say that such a doctrine is politically unreasonable. Within political liberalism nothing more need be said" (1997, 806).

Rawls, then, seems both to acknowledge and to deny that liberalism needs to justify itself on what he would call comprehensive grounds. He finds all such appeals to moral truth to be politically suspect and hostile the flourishing of pluralism, but his objections to such absolutist claims are rooted in a deep-seated loyalty to a certain picture of democracy which he simultaneously seems to accept as a moral absolute. His thought therefore appears to provide a particularly lucid and thoughtful representation of that combination of relativism and moralism which Hunter finds to be so prevalent among contemporary progressives. He sees (rightly) that modern democracy contains a diversity of competing and irreconcilable worldviews, but he also appears not to acknowledge sufficiently the extent to which that pluralism is limited to secondary or nonpolitical matters. Thus mistaking superficial pluralism for deep pluralism, Rawls takes for granted the existence of a certain moral outlook which endorses toleration and freedom of conscience and which originated as a product of the Enlightenment's reform of religion. His loyalty to democracy compels him to acknowledge the need for its most fundamental principles to be defended, but his simultaneous endorsement of anti-foundationalism and his suspicion that any such defense would be somehow illiberal leaves him incapable of providing it. The apologies which he presents for occasionally asserting the justice of his

own way of life would therefore seem to be indicative of a lack of self-confidence, and indeed, of a spiritual lethargy that may very well be present throughout the society which he often claims to be merely describing.

The thinkers of the Enlightenment, however, had no such qualms, and their arguments on behalf of democracy, toleration, liberty of conscience, and other basic freedoms were presented in the full awareness that these principles would have to be justified before an audience whose religious disposition rendered it fundamentally hostile to them. Locke and Spinoza in particular tried to argue for freedom of speech and thought while fully aware that the Bible, at least as interpreted in their time, did not sanction the account of free faith which Rawls is confident can be attributed to it. They therefore provided arguments for these principles which appealed not only to universal reason but also to a new interpretation of Scripture—an interpretation which was intended to change how we think about what a church is, who should be tolerated, and what God requires of us in order to attain salvation. If we are therefore to make headway in discovering the principled defense of liberal freedoms which Rawls requires but cannot provide, it is to these Enlightenment thinkers that we must first turn.

Chapter 3: Locke's Reasonable Christianity

"There is an innumerable multitude of sects in the United States. All differ in the worship one must render to the Creator, but all agree on the duties of men toward one another. Each sect therefore adores God in its manner, but all sects preach the same morality in the name of God. If it serves man very much as an individual that his religion be true, this is not so for society. Society has nothing to fear nor to hope from the other life; and what is most important to it is not so much that all citizen profess the true religion but that they profess a religion."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 278

"It is also from this point of view that the inhabitants of the United States themselves consider religious beliefs. I do not know if all Americans have faith in their religion—for who can read to the bottom of hearts?—but I am sure that they believe it necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 280.

"America is, however, still the place in the world where the Christian religion has most preserved genuine powers over souls."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 278

The analysis contained in the previous chapter has raised some troubling questions about the most common attempts to preserve the political fruits of the Enlightenment while jettisoning its rationalist foundations. As we have seen, the most serious thinkers on both ends the political spectrum often show themselves to be unconsciously dependent on that same tradition of modern political rationalism which they criticize—and in particular, they display a common tendency to presuppose a particular understanding of religion which our society has inherited from the thinkers who laid its theoretical foundations. The next two chapters will therefore attempt to make the nature of this inheritance clear by detailing how the Enlightenment sought to render Christianity less zealous and demanding—and therefore more pacific and

tolerant—than it was in pre-liberal societies. They will try to show the ways in which the originators of early modern liberalism sought gradually and subtly to change the religious outlooks of the societies in which they lived, and how they therefore articulated that "account of free faith" which Rawls correctly diagnoses as ubiquitous in democracy today.

Now, this intended project of cultural transformation is perhaps most clearly apparent in Benedict de Spinoza's *Theologico-Political Treatise*, which contains not only the first philosophic argument for a democratic republic devoted to the protection of freedom of thought and speech, but which also not coincidentally laid the foundations for modern ways of reading the Bible. Spinoza's suggestion that Scripture is best understood as historical and cultural literature—that its accounts of miracles and revelations should be seen as the poetic and imaginative expressions of a traditional, pre-scientific people, and that it was written not by a single author but was instead the product of a two-thousand year process of literary accumulation—shocked his contemporaries, and they would no doubt still be considered shocking in some circles today. Indeed, the sheer radicalism of Spinoza's thought would appear to provide a reason to begin our investigation not with his work but instead with that of John Locke, whose writing has not only carried greater weight historically in the Anglo-American world,[39] but whose religious teaching is also much more moderate than that of his contemporary, and who should therefore hold greater appeal across the current political spectrum. Locke's *Letter*

[39] The classic text here is Hartz 1955. See also Curti 1937 and Miller 1943. For an overview of the debates surrounding Locke's place in early American political thought, see the discussions in Dworetz

Concerning Toleration, after all, articulates the classic liberal solution to the problem of the separation of church and state—a solution which rests on the creation of a distinction between a public sphere and a private sphere, and which accordingly consigns religion to the realm of the latter.[40] But the *Letter* also joins that apparently secular teaching to a set of unmistakably theological claims. Thus, in the work's very first sentence Locke declares that he esteems "Toleration to be the chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church," (23)[41] and he then goes on to cite the authority of the Gospel in order to inveigh against the cruelties, and indeed the impieties, of religious persecution (23-4).

Thus, despite his arguments for a version of what would become our secular doctrine of the separation of church and state, Locke's foremost motivations are generally taken to be religious ones. For this reason, his arguments for toleration are now commonly considered unacceptable by scholars working in the tradition of contemporary liberal thought.[42] Indeed, not only does Locke ground his theory of toleration on Biblical arguments, but these religious underpinnings appear to be connected to a severe restriction on religious pluralism: in one of the most famous part of the *Letter*, Locke

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1990, 3-38 and Pangle 1988, 7-39. For Locke's influence in Great Britain and on the Continent, see Israel 2001, 515-27.

[40] Myers calls the *Letter* "the founding document of modern political liberalism" (Myers 1998, 180). Cf. also Wootton 1993, 105

[41] Unless otherwise noted, all references to the *Letter* in this chapter are to William Popple's English translation, which is contained in Locke 1983.

[42] See the discussion in Schwartzman 2005. As Dunn writes in the introduction to his study of Locke's political thought, "I simply cannot conceive of constructing an analysis of any issue in contemporary political theory around the affirmation or negation of anything which Locke says about political matters. The only argument in his entire political philosophy which does seem to me still to be interesting as a starting point for reflection about any issue of contemporary political theory is the theme of the *Letters on Toleration*, and in Locke's thought this rests firmly upon a religious premise. Indeed one of the central expository points made throughout this book is the innate dependence of an extremely high proportion of Locke's arguments for their very intelligibility, let alone plausibility, on a series of theological commitments (Dunn 1969, x-xi; cf. also 1984, 59).

denies toleration not only to Roman Catholics and the intolerant, but also to atheists (49-51). In the minds of many contemporary liberals, these restrictions are sufficient to make Locke at best a proto-liberal thinker (cf. Israel 2006, 139-44; Wootton 1993, 104-6), and even attempts to claim that his arguments are acceptable potential constituents of a Rawlsian overlapping consensus must necessarily overlook the one condition which he apparently considered indispensable for the maintenance of a healthy liberal society (cf. Schwartzman 2005). For it is not sufficient, according to Locke, simply to ensure that liberalized religious arguments exist alongside potentially atheistic ones, for the "taking away of God, tho but even in thought, *dissolves all*" (*Letter* 51, emphasis added).

At the same time, however, these restrictions may also be a sign that Locke's thought is both more clear-sighted and more moderate than that of most contemporary theorists. For against thinkers on the Right like Kraynak, Locke promises to show that Christianity, properly interpreted, contains a robust and permanently enduring teaching about limited government, religious freedom, and human rights. But on the other hand, against thinkers like Rawls, Locke's thought appears to contain a sober (if religiously driven) assessment of the dangers of an increasingly secular kind of liberalism. Indeed, there is good reason to suspect that he wrote *The Reasonable of Christianity* as a response to Spinoza and those more radical thinkers who were to follow in his wake. In defending that work against the attacks of his antagonist John Edwards (Edwards 1984), Locke wrote that he had intended it "chiefly for those who were not yet thoroughly, or firmly, Christians," and that he therefore had sought primarily—if not exclusively—to reach "those, who either wholly disbelieved, or doubted of the truth of the Christian religion"

(Locke [1823] 1963, 7:164).[43] Intending to reach those who had "mistaken and slandered" Christianity, Locke had written, as he claimed, in the "hope of doing some service to decaying piety" (ibid., 165). Now, considering that the audience which Locke sought primarily to reach was apparently made up of freethinkers, to say nothing of outright atheists, it would seem likely that his arguments in favor of piety would need to be crafted to appeal, at least at some level, to secular concerns.[44] There would thus seem to be at least grounds to suspect that Locke may have sought to roll back a "decaying piety" by inculcating a mindset that is quite similar to the one described by Tocqueville in the quotations provided at the opening of this chapter: by showing the utility of religion in addition to arguing for its truth, Locke may have hoped to show not only that Spinoza had gone too far, but also that a concern for Christianity's social benefits can allow it to preserve its "genuine powers over souls."[45]

There is therefore good reason to think that the liberalized yet nonetheless strong piety which Tocqueville claimed to have seen in America is very much of a piece with

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[43] Helpful background on Edwards' attack can be found in Higgins-Biddle 1999.

[44] The two major exceptions to the scholarly consensus regarding Locke primarily as a religious thinker are Macpherson 1962, 194-262 and Strauss 1953, 202-51. Wootton discovers in Strauss and those who have accepted his interpretation a "simplification" of Locke's thought which attributes to him a desire "to inculcate irreligion" (Wootton 2003, 69). This allegation, of course, assumes that a thinker's political teaching must necessarily reflect his personal religious beliefs. It ignores the possibility that Locke may have been a rationalist who was convinced of the need to support popular religion in one form or another, and that he therefore may have written in a way that reflected his concern for this perceived need.

[45] Of course, the suggestion that Locke may be responding in part to Spinoza (as well as Hobbes) is obviously contradicted by his claim that he was "not so well read" in these authors "as to be able to say what their Opinions" were (*Reply to the Bishop of Worcester*, quoted in Higgins-Biddle 1999, xxix). Records of Locke's library catalogue, however, show that he owned a copy of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* and the *Opera Posthuma* (as well as the *Leviathan* and other works by these two thinkers) (see Harrison and Laslett 1965, 155, 238).

the "reasonable" Christianity which Locke articulated in his work of that title.[46] He seems to promise the possibility of a religious outlook which liberal citizens can become attached to for the social benefits which it provides, but which does not also by that very fact risk undermining itself. He claims to show that religion is or can be made tolerant without becoming empty of real spiritual content, and indeed, that the religious morality which all liberal faiths have in common can provide the basis for a spirited attachment on the part of citizens to the common good—an attachment which will prevent the liberal idea of individual freedom from giving way to a narrow or hedonistic selfishness. To see this, it will be helpful to consider briefly the overall impression which Locke' case for toleration conveys. The *Letter* contains a number of interweaving arguments, but the one with which the work opens anticipates the claim of *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that the spirit of the Gospel "is that of Charity" (Locke [1823] 1963, 7:3). As Locke defines it in the *Letter*, that spirit of charity, or the true teaching of the Church of Christ, commands the humane treatment even of "those that are not Christians" (*Letter* 23), and it therefore seems to suggest that the primary message of the Gospel is one about good works. To be sure, he acknowledges throughout the *Letter* that only true belief and correct forms of worship can be acceptable to God, but he also presents persecution for

[46] The tremendously strong place which Lockean religious ideals held in America during the Revolutionary Period has been demonstrated by Dworetz (1990). See especially his discussion of the New England clergy's knowledge and admiration of Locke's "scripture commentary" as early as the 1730s, and of their subsequent use of it in the 1770s to justify rebellion (ibid., ch. 5). Dworetz's account provides powerful historical evidence of the way in which Locke's religious teaching successfully combined a concern for self-interest and individual rights with a spirited concern for religious duty. He also records the way in which Locke's interpretations of the Bible were able to transform some of the classic Christian proof-texts commanding obedience to the established authorities into mandates about the duty to resist such authorities when they become tyrannical (see esp. his brief discussion of Romans 13 on pp. 169-72). For a broader discussion of the place of Locke's theology—and that of Enlightenment religious ideas more generally—in

the sake of such things as a manifest sin which places souls "in danger of eternal Perdition" (24). Thus, as Locke describes them in the *Letter*, "the introducing of Ceremonies" and "the establishment of Opinions"—"which for the most part are about nice and intricate Matters, that exceed the Capacity of ordinary Understandings" (24)—would appear to be of much lesser importance than those rules of common decency which not only hold society together, but which also enable citizens to enjoy the "Life, Liberty, Health, and Indolency of Body" which are protected by the liberal regime (26).

But it is possible to go further. Because Locke is seeking to lay the basis not just for peace, but also for the idea that toleration is a duty as well as a right (Tarcov 1999, 180)—and so too for a richer sense of social bonds—it is unlikely that he would have expected such bonds to form among citizens who believed one another to be damned on account of dogmas, ceremonies, and anything else that has little to do with moral behavior (cf. Myers 1998, 184-5). Thus, the *Letter* declares most ceremonies, including baptism, to be but "frivolous things" which "might be observed or omitted" without prejudice to the salvation of souls. Its overall impression is therefore, if not to denigrate the outward forms of worship, then at least to consider the emphasis placed upon them to be unfortunate, since this tends to "breed implacable Enmities amongst Christian Brethren, who are all agreed in the Substantial and truly Fundamental part of Religion" (36). That substantial and fundamental part of religion, on the other hand, would appear capable of fostering some truly rich social bonds. The same church that "*judges not those that are without*" will also embrace "all Men that are honest, peaceable and industrious"

America throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, see Ahlstrom 1972, 343-63, 466, 518-9, as

(54; I Cor. 5:12-13). As Tocqueville observed in America, the idea that a church is a private association which men can enter or leave in accordance with their consciences, and thus also that freedom of conscience and the rest of Christian morality are of greater importance than forms of worship, has the potential to create a "natural Fellowship" among men that can take a robust and spirited direction (31; cf. Tocqueville 2000, 281). Indeed, men who have been brought up to believe that "the Laws of Equity, both Humane and Divine," are laid down to protect their private freedoms, will also be animated by that same sense of justice on those occasions when those rights are infringed. If they should find it necessary, they will "think it lawful . . . to resist Force with Force, and to defend their natural Rights . . . with Arms as well as they can" (55).

The potential success of Lockean liberalism therefore would seem to hinge on the subtle creation of a new kind of theology which will quietly, and unofficially, replace the intolerant brands of Christianity that he identifies at the opening of the *Letter* as nearly universally accepted in his own time. Most famously, he denies the privilege of toleration to those churches that "will not own and teach the Duty of tolerating All men in matters of religion," or perhaps even "in matters of meer Religion" (50).[47] This proviso would have likely denied toleration to "almost all the churches of Locke's day except the

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well as Curti 1937, 114-17.

[47] The word "meer" does not appear in the Latin text of the *Letter*, but it is present in Popple's English translation (cf. Locke 1963, 90). In the introduction to this edition of the *Letter*, Montuori argues that William Popple's 1689 translation was based on a Latin text likely given to Popple by Locke himself and that "Locke followed Popple's work very closely and certainly checked Popple's translation" (Locke 1963, xl). After noting several instances in which Locke either refused to repudiate, or even claimed credit for, Popple's English version, Montuori concludes "without a shadow of a doubt, that Popple's translation, supervised and approved by Locke, is rather a new edition" of the *Letter* "than an unauthorized translation of it" (Locke 1963, xlvi). See the evidence he presents in Locke 1963, xxx-xlvi. But cf. Wootton 1993, 133 n.21.

Quakers" (Tarcov 1999, 179-80), and so it seems that his intention must have been to lay the basis for a society that could not have come into existence within his own lifetime. He looks forward to an imagined future when "pulpits every where" will resound with his "Doctrine of Peace and Toleration" (34); when the faithful of all denominations will be taught from their first day in Sunday School that the Gospel commands a respect for the natural rights of others; and therefore when the overwhelming majority of citizens will agree to the proposition that any minister of God who teaches otherwise "understands not" or "neglects the Business of his Calling," and that he shall consequently "one day give account thereof unto the Prince of Peace" (34). The Lockean liberal state, in short, will have the legitimacy and the popular backing to deny intolerant faiths the right to free exercise because it will have come into being in part as the result of an educational project that will have subtly changed citizens' views about what true religion requires. But to the extent that this new understanding of religion has been successfully implemented, this is a power that it will seldom if ever have to use.

The Letter and the Reasonableness

Now of course, the *Letter* is a polemical work, and aside from a few scattered quotations from Scripture, its claim that toleration is "the chief Characteristical Mark of the True Church" is by and large a dogmatic one. The ethic which it puts forth as the authentic teaching of the Gospel therefore presupposes a more direct and dialectical engagement with the New Testament, and Locke provides this in *The Reasonableness of Christianity*. While a full appreciation of Locke's religious teaching would require an

analysis not only of the *Reasonableness* and the *Letter*, but also of his other major works—a task which is obviously too large for present purposes—a brief examination of Locke's treatment of the Gospel should shed some light on the specific character of the moral and religious ethic which he expected to characterize the future citizens of liberal-democratic society. This will not only help to elucidate the character of the religious outlook which Tocqueville found on display in America, but it will also serve as a springboard to a discussion of the more radical philosophic teaching of Spinoza.

But before delving into the *Reasonableness*, it will be helpful to say a few words about the puzzling relation of that work to the remainder of Locke's corpus. The overwhelming view among Locke scholars is that the *Reasonableness* was written at least partly in an attempt to remedy the defective arguments that were present in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. In the latter work, Locke had repeatedly asserted that morality is capable of demonstration, but he had also inexplicably failed to provide any such demonstration. More specifically, he had claimed that morality requires a providential God "who sees Men in the dark" and has the power to reward or punish them according to their deeds (*Essay* I.3.6). Thus, it follows that if morality can be demonstrated, such a God can be shown to exist as well, but although Locke promises to provide a proof to this effect (see, e.g., *Essay* IV.10.12), his attempt to do so is a notorious failure.[48] It is therefore frequently claimed that Locke's entire theoretical

[48] Dunn writes that "the *Essay* as a whole shows one glaring defect. The demonstrative argument for God's existence which it offers goes no distance at all towards establishing the reality of a God concerned to punish or save human beings. The unmistakably Christian conception of a God on which Locke's moral convictions rested could be vindicated only by an appeal to revelation" (1984, 84; cf. also 66 and 1969, 94-5). According to Dunn, this failure serves "to illuminate some of the key restraints on his imagination" (ibid., 86). Similarly, Ashcraft throws up his hands at Locke's "repetitious, dogmatic assertions." As he

project—which spanned at least four decades—ultimately showed itself to be marked by a deep incoherence; that he dedicated his life to showing that ethics, and hence also divine providence, could be demonstrated mathematically, but when he realized his inability to do this he took refuge at the end of his life in the study of Scripture, and the fruit of this was *The Reasonableness of Christianity* as well as *A Paraphrase and Notes on the Epistles of St. Paul*.[49] This view of Locke therefore holds that his rationalist convictions were rooted at bottom in a deep and abiding Christian faith, and that although that faith may have been heterodox by the standards of the society in which he lived,[50] it nevertheless led him to the view that reason at its utmost can do no more than come to recognize its "own self-limitations" (Ewing 1965, xviii). Thus, although Locke may have failed in his endeavor to ground "the ethics of a gentleman" (Marshall 1994, 157) in unassisted reason, and although his life's work as a whole may be ultimately disjointed, that failure was ultimately the product of deep and admirable sentiment which led him to concentrate all his efforts on trying to vindicate the particular code of selfless behavior which he termed the Law of Nature.[51]

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complains, "The circular reasoning of an argument which infers the existence of God from a perceived rational ordering of objects, and which defends the 'rationality' of that order in terms of God's intentions, is never breached in the *Essay*. Indeed, it is as though Locke is engaged in exploring the various radii of knowledge as they touch upon the perimeters of his beliefs, but never does he permit himself to step outside the circle of his faith" (Ashcraft 1969, 204-5). See also Marshall 1994, 384. But for a contrary perspective, see Owen 2007, 159ff. and Pangle 1988, 198-204, 214-5.

[49] Versions of this thought can be found in Ashcraft 1969, 218ff.; Dunn 1969, 187, 193-4; 1984, 66-7, 85; Higgins-Biddle 1999, xcix-ci; Marshall 1994, xii-xviii, 388, 449; and Wootton 1993, 111-12.

[50] Wootton, for example, tries to rescue Locke from the charge of rationalism by associating him with Socinianism (1993, 66ff.).

[51] Noble though it may have been, however, Locke's outlook according to this presentation is not thereby appealing. Thus, Dunn writes that Locke's teaching on how one should live was even "from his own point of view a disastrous failure. Unlike his theory of knowledge, it offers scarcely even the core of a view which we might ourselves hold" (1984, vi).

Now, this line of interpretation seems to accord very much with the devout tone in which much of the *Reasonableness* is written, and it also seems to be urged on us by Locke himself, who scatters that work with the same kind of unfulfilled promises that pervade the *Essay*. Its very title, after all, seems to promise exactly that proof of a providential God—and indeed, of the Christian God—which is missing from the *Essay*, and lest we overlook this clue, Locke also repeatedly informs the reader throughout the work that "the light of reason" has "revealed to all mankind" not only that God exists, but also that he is "good and merciful" (231[133]).[52] It therefore appears incorrect to presuppose that Locke merely gave a "misleading title" to a work that was actually intended to proclaim "the failure of reason" (Spellman 1988, 129), or that by calling Christianity "reasonable" he really meant only that it was simple and straightforward—i.e. "not extravagant, not forced, not extraordinary" (Yolton 1985, 88). Rather, considering his claim to have written this work for a rationalist audience, it appears once again that he intended—and apparently failed—to show that the teachings of Jesus Christ, and especially his promise of heavenly rewards for virtue, can be demonstrated on rational grounds. As we will shortly see, his argument to this effect will culminate in an almost laughably thin argument asserting that reason can attest to the veracity of Jesus' miracles, which has predictably shown itself to be another easy source of criticism from contemporary scholars (see, e.g., Mooney and Imbrosciano 2005). But to understand why Locke is apparently content to present himself like this, and why he is especially

[52] Unless otherwise noted, all references in the remainder of this chapter come from *The Reasonableness*, which I cite by paragraph number (helpfully provided in the Ewing edition) followed in square brackets by the corresponding page number in volume seven of *The Works of John Locke* (Locke [1823] 1963).

inclined to do so to a rationalist audience, it will be helpful, as the dominant interpretation encourages us to do, to pay attention to the connections which may exist between Locke's moral teaching and his apparent attempts to show the rationality of the Christian revelation.

Locke claimed that he was prompted to write the *Reasonableness* when he was "accidentally" confronted with one of those religious quarrels that frequently "made so much noise and heat" among the dissenting churches of his day.[53] Such violent disputes over theology were perhaps the distinguishing feature of political life in post-Reformation England (to say nothing of Europe more generally), and Locke wrote the *Letter*, of course, in an attempt to bring them under control. But whereas the *Letter* tries to establish that control by positing a set of unproven answers to theological questions, *The Reasonableness* "tends to peace and union among Christians" (Locke [1823] 1963, 7:189) because, in Locke's words, it provides "a stricter and more thorough inquiry into the question about justification" (ibid. 186). As we had earlier been tempted to suspect, then, it appears that the *Reasonableness* will provide those theological proofs that the *Letter's* dogmatic assertions about the way to salvation cry out for. It contains Locke's confrontation with the "direct and plain" message which he says he encountered in Scripture (and which in turn seems inextricably linked to Christianity's tendency to beget religious violence) "that it was faith that justified" (ibid. 186-7).[54] In order to discover

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[53] *A Second Vindication of the Reasonableness of Christianity*, in Locke [1823] 1963, 7:186.

[54] For a helpful analysis of the religious and political climate which spurred Locke to write the *Reasonableness*, and of the link between the New Testament's emphasis on faith and Christianity's historical tendency to produce "schisms, separations, contentions, animosities, quarrels, blood and butchery" (ibid. 358), see Zuckert 2002, 149-53.

the character of that faith, Locke claims that he undertook a fresh "reading of the New Testament"—a reading which examined only the words of the Bible itself, and which thus advantageously ignored nearly seventeen hundred years of interpretation. Even more surprisingly, Locke acknowledges that the teaching which he gathered from this direct and literal reading of the Bible was so novel and so unconventional that it had absolutely nothing in common with any existing "systems of divinity." On the contrary, as he writes, "the general silence I had in my little reading met with, concerning any such thing, awed me with the apprehension of singularity" (ibid. 187).

Paradoxically, the teaching which Locke discovered to be the plain and common sense understanding of Christianity was not shared in his time by a single actual Christian.[55] He thus admits that his teaching is likely to come to sight as heterodox, at least by seventeenth century standards, and he also begins to hint at what he found to be defective about more ordinary interpretations of the Bible. In the *Second Vindication*, at any rate, Locke mentions two distinct differences between his own interpretation of Scripture and that which is contained in the "books of divinity" which he has read. Firstly, Locke claims that he was the first to notice the way in which Jesus displayed an extreme caution in his public speeches and therefore communicated his most important messages indirectly, through "parables and figurative ways of speaking." Secondly, and of greater immediate importance, Locke says that he discovered evidence in the Bible for "the necessity" that a lawgiver such as Jesus "should be sent from God, for the reforming

[55] It was, however, shared by Thomas Hobbes, who, as Locke's critic John Edwards pointed out, claimed in chapter xliii of the *Leviathan* that the only belief needed to make one a Christian is that Jesus is the Messiah. See Edwards 1984, 129 along with Zuckert 2002, 154-5.

the morality of the world" (ibid. 187). The *Reasonableness*, as previously mentioned, was therefore written not only to rebut the claims of orthodox theologians, but also (if not primarily) to answer the objections which were commonly "made by Deists against Christianity" (ibid. 188). Those objections maintain that Christianity is unreasonable because it calls for the acceptance of dogmas that cannot be understood, and also that it is unnecessary—for society, so it is alleged, does not require support from supernatural revelation (ibid. 188). Now, in thus arguing against Deism, Locke claims the rhetorical advantage that comes from opposing what appears to be a kind of barely concealed atheism, but he also makes a serious point about the dangers of popularized rationalism. For Deists and others like them may naively overlook the civic need for a popular belief in such things as reason cannot verify. Indeed, as Locke insists, Christianity's moral teaching (when properly reformed, to be sure) "might be of some use in the world" even now precisely because its teaching about divinely revealed law surpasses "all that philosophy and human reason" has "attained to, or could possibly make effectual to all degrees of mankind" (ibid. 188).

SIN, REDEMPTION, AND MERIT

The *Reasonableness*, then, appears to be an attempt to carve out a middle path between the views of orthodox theologians who oppose toleration, on the one hand, and those of Deists who are hostile to Christianity, on the other. At the opening of the work, Locke finds these two positions represented in two "extreme" opinions about Adam's

Fall and thus also about Christ's redemption. While "some men would have all Adam's posterity doomed to eternal infinite punishment for the transgression of Adam, whom millions had never heard of, and no one had authorised to transact for him or be his representative; this seemed to others so little consistent with the justice or goodness of the great and infinite God, that they thought there was no redemption necessary" (1[4-5]). Now, the first position is precisely that of the traditional idea of original sin. It holds that Adam's sin brought about a corruption of human nature and "a state of guilt" that condemned all his posterity to "endless torment, in hellfire" (3[6]). According to this view, it was only God's grace in sending His son to mankind that permitted a select few to escape such a fate and to enter paradise, and then not through works but only through faith in Christ. According to Locke, however, this idea is so far from that of authentic Christianity that it actually shakes "the foundations of all religion" (1[4]). Those who object to it on the grounds that it undermines God's justice are correct. For God to condemn men to a final and irreversible death is one thing (for men, being naturally mortal, have "no right" to an everlasting existence), but for Him to put them "in a state of misery, worse than not being, without any fault or demerit of their own," is quite another. This indeed "would be hard to reconcile with the notion we have of justice" and would in fact, as Locke quite baldly states, "confound good and evil, God and Satan" (5[8]). Not only is the idea of original sin unjust, but, as Locke points out with relief, it is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament: "But, as I remember, everyone's sin is charged upon himself only" (4[7]).

While Locke thus grants the objections which Deists pose to traditional Christianity, he also suggests that those objections do not apply to the authentic or original version of it which can be uncovered through an uncorrupted reading of the Bible. But his message to the Deists also seems to be that they have not thought adequately about those moral concerns which have led them to reject original sin. Their dissatisfaction with the idea of undeserved divine punishment, Locke suggests, leads them to "make Jesus Christ nothing but the restorer and preacher of pure natural religion; thereby doing violence to the whole tenour of the New Testament." Not only is it far-fetched to read natural religion into the Bible, but it would also seem to hinder the task of moral edification which, as Locke will eventually argue, really composes the "whole tenour of the New Testament" (1[5]). Locke's compromise solution, as he states it initially, is that the Bible should be read as "a collection of writings, designed by God, for the instruction of the illiterate bulk of mankind, in the way to salvation" (1[4-5]). For this task natural religion is insufficient, and the "illiterate bulk" need to regard the Gospel as a divinely revealed and therefore coherent work—a work which, to be sure, needs to be understood in a way that takes into account the language and the modes of speaking of the ancient Jews (1[5]), but which nonetheless was "designed by God" in its entirety.

Now, Locke does not here say what the way to salvation is, nor does he indicate what opinion he thinks the literate minority ought to hold about it. But since the traditional Christian teaching about justification rests upon the presupposition of original sin, it is hard to see how Locke's view of that subject could avoid heterodoxy. He claims that in paradise Adam enjoyed "a state of immortality, of life without end," which he then

lost when he ate from the Tree of Knowledge (2[5]). This immortality was not due to Adam by right but was given to him only by the grace of God (6[7-8]), and when God in turn expelled him from Eden and declared that he and all his posterity should eventually die, He committed no injustice. Since humans have no right to anything beyond "a temporary mortal life," God merely returned Adam's descendents to the condition which nature had assigned them (5-6[7]). But if Locke's description of our condition here is disconcerting, it is also brief, and he does not give the reader much time to consider why a benevolent and all-powerful God would create us only to condemn us to an inevitable, final mortality. Indeed, this view of human life would seem to be even more troubling than the one provided by original sin, since the latter at least gives an explanation for why the human condition is at it is. But before the reader can think too much about this, Locke pulls back, and he raises the hopeful possibility of eternal life. For by Jesus, "the second Adam," men are "restored to life again, that so by Adam's sin they may none of them lose anything, which by their own righteousness they might have a title to" (9[9]). As Locke thus surprisingly insists, according to Scripture all those who live their lives in "exact obedience to the law" do not receive immortality by God's benevolence but in fact "have a claim of right to eternal life" (9[9]).[56]

Now, his primary evidence for this is Romans 4:4: "to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt." But notwithstanding this quotation, the

[56] By claiming first that men have no right to anything other than a mortal condition and then almost immediately reversing himself, Locke obviously provides two contradictory answers to the question of whether by natural right men may become entitled to eternal life. This tension remains present beneath the surface of the discussion that is to follow, and it provides the first hint that the Bible's teaching about an afterlife, even as reinterpreted by Locke, may not actually enjoy the sanction of reason which he insists that it does. Cf. Rabieh 1991, 948 n.12 and context.

Biblically alert reader should immediately be struck not only by this strange doctrine, but moreover by Locke's claim to find it in the mouth of such an authority as St. Paul, who is perhaps the most prominent Biblical champion of the idea of justification by faith. And indeed, Locke's invocation of Romans here appears puzzling to say the least, for the words he quotes are immediately preceded by the claim that Abraham's works could not justify him before God (Rom. 4:3, cf. also 4:13). Indeed, in this passage as a whole Paul appears to be attacking the very position which Locke is arguing for, and this problem grows all the more acute when Locke glosses Jesus' words at Luke 10:25 to show what is needed to inherit eternal life: "'Do this,' i.e. what is required by the law, 'and thou shalt live'" (9[10]). But what is "required by the law" according to this passage is not simply to obey the law, but to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind; and thy neighbour as thyself" (Luke 10:27). What the Bible considers necessary for salvation, in other words, is not simply the performance of good works, but instead an internal disposition of loving devotion, to God and to others, which, because it is carried out with *all* one's soul, is contaminated with no admixture whatsoever of concern for one's own well-being or worldly prosperity. By providing such an unorthodox, and indeed, grossly erroneous reading of these Biblical passages so early in the work, Locke thus seems to be signaling to the careful reader what his strategy will be as he moves forward. If his teaching here is any indication, it seems that he will attempt in what follows not just to interpret Scripture, but to impose onto it a new moral teaching which will seek to downplay the New Testament's emphasis on selfless devotion.

But to return to Locke's summary of the Biblical narrative, he claims that the law which guarantees human beings a right to immortality in return for obedience is "the law of reason" or "of nature" (14[11]); it is the unchangeable "eternal law of right" (20[13]) and it is identical to what Locke elsewhere calls the "law of works," as distinguished from the "law of faith" (16[12]). This law was revealed to the Jews in the moral part of the law of Moses (18, 20, 22[12-14]) and also to the Gentiles (as Locke discovers through a somewhat contentious reading of St. Paul) via natural reason, "their consciences bearing witness" (19, 22[13-14]; Romans 2:15).[57] Part of that law, as announced by Christ and confirmed by reason, states that all who follow its prescriptions with absolute fidelity shall enjoy "eternal life and bliss" (12[11]), but those who fail to do so in "any way" or commit even a single transgression shall face the prospect of certain mortality (11[10]). The only alternative to the existence of such a law is the authorization of "disorder, confusion, and wickedness," for as Locke states (and this is as far as he goes at this point in showing the grounds for the law of works in natural reason), if disobedience is permitted in any small detail "government and order are at an end; and there can be no bounds set to the lawless exorbitancy of unconfined man" (14[11]).

But although the law of works may require "an exact performance of every tittle" with no possibility of atonement (16-17[12]), it is also the case that humans all inevitably

[57] Locke inserts a parentheses into his quotation of Romans 2:14-15 which suggests that the Gentiles follow a "law written in their hearts" because they "find it reasonable to do" so (11[13]). Paul, however, never mentions reason, and in *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (I.3.8-9) Locke quite explicitly says that there is no such thing as the conscience.

sin and so are practically incapable of claiming a right to eternal life (12[10-11]).[58] Were matters to stand thus, we would be without the hope for a better state (and virtue would similarly remain bereft of the possibility of reward). Fortunately, according to Locke, "Christian believers have the privilege to be under the law of faith too" (23[15]), and under the terms of this law God, following the death and resurrection of Christ, has permitted faith "to supply the defect of full obedience" and has thus admitted believers "to life and immortality, as if they were righteous" (22[14]). In Locke's theology, as now becomes clear, reward and punishment are doled out "to every one according to his works" (6[8]), but faith can be used as a kind of currency that can be exchanged to make up for our inevitable moral failings. None "are truly punished but for their own *deeds*" (6[8], emphasis added), and so while human beings are theoretically at liberty to think as they wish, in practice only believers in Christ can be saved.[59]

To uncover this doctrine in the New Testament, Locke continually refers to Paul's epistles, but it is worth paying attention once again to some of the differences between

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[58] Spellman, who interprets all of Locke's works as devoted to vindicating the traditional idea of original sin, understandably has some trouble with these opening passages. Indeed, what is puzzling about Locke's presentation here is that he is wholly silent as to why our reason—or even the maintenance of human societies—demands such a draconian law, nor does he explain why we are incapable of following it. He thus seems to allow his more traditionally-minded readers to assume that he believes sin to be "the product of a voluntary but universal unwillingness to obey God's law" (Spellman 1988, 140). As we will soon see, later in the *Reasonableness* Locke reverses his position and claims that we are fallible and imperfect by nature and that we therefore have a reason to expect forgiveness (182[112])—which implies of course that our slips-up are not wholly voluntary.

[59] Believers therefore have everything to gain and nothing to lose by accepting Christ. Indeed, throughout the *Reasonableness* Locke continually emphasizes the hopeful message of Jesus' "good tidings" (84[46], 99[53]) and pays little attention to the promises of hellfire with which he frequently threatens unbelievers. Locke does, however, mention these occasionally—e.g. at 45[26], 97[51], and 161[99]—perhaps to indicate the new gloss he is putting on the Biblical text (at 161[99] Locke even mentions the threat of damnation as a part of Christ's "happy tidings"). In these opening paragraphs, Locke states that the punishment of those who would not follow Jesus "was to lose their souls, i.e. their lives" (15[12]). On Locke's equivocation about hell, see Rabieh 954 n.16.

Locke and Paul in order to see where Locke quietly diverges from the traditional Christian teaching. On the surface, their positions are similar, for both agree that, as a practical matter, only Christian believers have access to immortality. But Locke's deeper, theoretical disagreement with Paul would seem to be signaled by his repeated invocation in the work's opening section of Paul's statement that "By one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin" (2,6,10[6,7,10]; Rom. 5:12). This, of course, is one of the clearest statements in the New Testament of the idea of original sin which Locke has claimed not to find in the Bible, and it is followed by a declaration, which Locke does not quote, that after the Fall "death reigned . . . even over them that had not sinned" (Rom. 5:14). According to Paul, as previously intimated, even a complete adherence to the moral law is incapable of justifying someone before God. Because humans are inherently corrupt, they have no capacity for holiness on their own, and they can only be redeemed to a state of immortality by God's free gift of grace, something accessible solely to those with faith in Christ (Rom 5:15ff). This, roughly put, is the orthodox position which Locke at the opening of the work had declared to be incompatible "with the notion we have of justice" (6[8]), and as he proceeds it becomes clear that one of his overall goals in this work will be to read it out of the Bible. He claims (without reference to Scripture), that "Where there is no law, there is no sin." In such a state, he insists, nothing is required of men and "all are righteous equally, with or without faith" (21[13-14]). Thus, when Paul said that "all have sinned and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), he meant that obedience to the law must be sufficient to justify men and achieve that glory, for otherwise the very idea of sin would be

incomprehensible (19[13]). This reasoning, however, is alien to Paul, for whom law is not the definer of right and wrong—or a set of commandments whose fulfillment thus justifies one according to merit—but a punishment, or a sign of man's fallen nature. Sin "is not imputed when there is no law" (Rom. 5:13) because a state without law would be one where man would be free of the corruptions and depravities that make law necessary—it would be (and was) a state of paradise.[60] Locke thus quotes Paul's declaration that "Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law," but he omits the immediately preceding sentence, which declares that all those under the law are already cursed (17[12]; Gal. 3:10), as well as the following verse, which states that "no man is justified by the law in the sight of God" (Gal. 3:11).

Because Locke rejects original sin, which is the fundamental premise of the epistles from which he quotes, his discovery in Paul of a Biblical doctrine which holds that faith leads to salvation because it makes up for our deficient obedience to the law of nature is highly tendentious and even playful. In what may be his most far-fetched Biblical reference thus far, Locke claims that when Paul says "we establish the law" through faith (20[13]; Rom. 3:31) he is really speaking of the moral part of the law of Moses (or the law of nature), which, if it did not exist, would leave nothing to be

[60] To Paul, these corruptions and depravities consist not in misdeeds per se but in those lusts and inordinate longings that lead human beings to commit them. In suggesting that sin presupposes law and that without law nothing is forbidden, Locke also implies that these passions and desires are neither signs of a corrupt condition nor sins meriting punishment but rather simply an inescapable part of human nature. When discussing the roots of human action in the *Essay*, Locke writes that "if there be no Prospect beyond the Grave, the inference is certainly right, *Let us eat and drink*, let us enjoy what we delight in, *for tomorrow we shall die*" (*Essay* II.21.55; Is. 22:13; I Cor. 15:32). What the Bible considers sin, Locke seems to regard simply an unavoidable part of our psychology.

"counted to men for righteousness," for, to repeat, there can be no transgression—and hence also no atonement through faith—without law (21[13-14]). Even a cursory glance at the passage from which Locke is quoting, however, should be sufficient to indicate that Paul is referring to a new law, the law of faith, which justifies only "him which believeth in Jesus"—i.e. not one who merely performs "the deeds of the law" (Rom. 3:26-8). Whereas in Locke's theology the law of faith is subordinate to the law of works—for belief merely makes up for our failure to perform actions which in theory would be sufficient to earn us immortality—in Paul's account the situation is quite the opposite. To Paul, not only is true belief required for salvation (and therefore subject to command), but actions by that very fact are inferior to and exist in the service of faith. In other words, the chief difference between Locke and Paul amounts to this: to Paul, in contrast to Locke, salvation can be achieved only through the internal submission of the mind to a set of doctrines which are not rational but revealed, and certainly not through the conformity of one's actions to a set of rules, no matter how rational or how necessary for the maintenance of human societies those rules may be. Locke's chief criticism of Paul, and thus also of most traditional interpretations of the Bible, would therefore seem to center around Christianity's *unreasonableness*, or its teaching that there is something more important than adhering to a law which reason vouches for because without it "there can be no bounds set to the lawless exorbitancy of unconfined man." Because it holds that earthly goods such as peace and security may need to be sacrificed in order to attain the heavenly good of salvation, the actual New Testament not only contradicts "the

notion we have of justice," but it is apt to give rise to precisely that kind of fanaticism which Locke wrote the *Reasonableness* to eliminate.[61]

THE LIFE AND MISSION OF JESUS

Locke's task in the remainder of the work, for which his interpretation of Paul has laid the necessary groundwork, will therefore be to describe a "reasonable" version of Christianity which is no longer prone to such excessive tendencies. Accordingly, he devotes the next and longest section of the work to showing just what, according to the Bible, human beings need to believe in order to be counted as having faith in Christ, and the answer he comes up with is, to say the least, undemanding. Through an excruciatingly detailed and endlessly repetitious examination of the history contained in the four Gospels and the Acts of the Apostles, Locke concludes that there is but a single article of belief necessary for salvation, namely that "Jesus is the Messiah," which is equivalent to his being the Christ, the King of the Jews, and the Son of God. Not only, then, does the Bible not require the acceptance of more specific and complicated creeds and doctrines (such as the Trinity, original sin, and transubstantiation), but it in fact enjoins only the most minimal set of beliefs that could possibly be considered Christian. Indeed, as we will see more at length below, the proposition which Jesus required believers to accept in order to be saved, according to Locke, was so vague and so

[61] Consider in this regard Locke's invocation of Mark 8:35-38 at the beginning of his discussion of the law of faith (15[12]). Locke, as previously noted, purports to discover Biblical evidence here for the view that there is nothing worse than losing one's life. In context, however, Jesus calls for extreme self-denial and

generalized that neither Christ's followers nor even the Apostles themselves truly understood what it meant.

Locke's analysis in this long section appears to be composed of two elements: a surface theological teaching which repeats over and over again the conclusion that only a single article of faith is necessary for salvation, and a more subtle and scattered historical account of who Jesus was, what kind of followers he attracted, and how the Christian religion came to be. As to the first of these, Locke's obvious achievement in arguing that the "great proposition" which "distinguished believers from unbelievers" at the time of Jesus was only whether "he was the Messiah or no" (28[17]) is to recast the entire Christian theological tradition as a series of false glosses and human impositions upon a single idea which is as simple and easy to understand as it is divine. By thus purporting to recover the original and authentic Christian message through an unbiased examination of its source in the Scriptures, Locke suggests that the religious wars which he is writing in response to are disputes over similarly human impositions. Since all European Christians already accept the proposition that Jesus is the Messiah, these quarrels are "not only barbarous but pointless" (Rabieh 1991, 941). Moreover, because the proposition required for salvation is so minimal, and indeed, so devoid of specific content, it is hard to see how anyone who is persuaded by Locke, whether Christian or not, would not assent to it—especially considering the immensity of what he would have to gain by doing so.

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declares that "whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35).

What makes the belief required for salvation so capacious, however, would also seem to render it rather unimportant—for in Locke's account, the single article that is needed to make one a Christian is so general that it asks almost nothing of us in terms of how we live our lives. True faith does not require that action be performed in its service,[62] and it certainly does not justify any kind of political or religious hierarchy.[63] In fact, as Locke proceeds he corrects a possible misimpression which we may have received at the opening of the work: for the simple belief that Jesus is the Messiah, it now appears, is actually not sufficient to gain someone the forgiveness that is necessary to attain eternal life. This is not because some other belief is required but, quite the opposite, because it is but the most preliminary requirement for salvation. In addition, certain things are "required to be *done* for justification" (50[28], emphasis added), and Jesus accordingly taught another set of lessons "that concerned practice, and not belief" (94[51]). Indeed, as Locke notes, even though at the time of the New Testament the single article was the only thing that allowed people to become members of the Church of Christ, this could only do so "as far as mere believing could make them so" (165[102]). This statement, which reminds of the mention of "mere religion" in the English version of the *Letter*, appears to suggest that belief is almost irrelevant altogether, and that

[62] When Locke discusses Jesus driving the traders from the temple, he interprets his words—"Make not my Father's house a house of merchandize" (77[43]; John 2:12-15)—to be simply a declaration that he is the Son of God and hence also the Messiah. Locke makes no mention whatsoever of the anti-commercial message of the story.

[63] Locke claims that Jesus' words at Matthew 16:18—"thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church"—refer not to Peter but to the idea of his being the Messiah. By suggesting that this universal creed is the rock or foundation of the Church, he presents a new interpretation of the Biblical passage traditionally used to justify Apostolic Succession (especially of the Pope, the spiritual descendent of St. Peter), but he can do this only by ignoring the obvious fact that Jesus is here speaking to Peter, as well as

works—perhaps even in the absence of faith—could perhaps be sufficient to gain someone entry into the Kingdom of God. The guiding premise of the *Reasonableness* until this point, of course, has been that only belief in Christ can make up for our moral failings, but it now appears that the actual content of that belief is so non-specific and vacuous as to be almost self-undermining. The simple mantra that "Jesus is the Messiah," after all, can be interpreted any number of ways, and Locke's teaching is that all of these ways are equally correct. Incensed by this, Locke's antagonist John Edwards correctly pointed out that the single article does not necessarily enjoin a belief even in Christ's divinity (Edwards 1984, 113; see also Zuckert 2002, 152-3). Now, to be sure, throughout this long section Locke insists on the continuing need for a belief in Jesus' miracles—and especially the resurrection—precisely because these are the sole evidence we have of that divinity (32[20]). But the general thrust of his argument would seem to give adherents of his new theology reasons at least to question how seriously these should be taken. For if the acceptance of miracles is but a pre-condition for "mere believing," then neither the grounds nor the content of that belief would appear to be of any great importance, and there would seem to be little need to acknowledge them in a way that does more than pay them lip-service.

The possibility that Locke may be quietly sewing doubt about Jesus' divinity requires more evidence, but it does provide a compelling reason to examine the historical account of the origins of Christianity which is also present in this section. To make sense of that account, it is helpful to begin with the fact, which Locke repeatedly mentions, that

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what seems to be an important Greek pun on the words for Peter (*Petros*) and rock (*petra*)

the "jews had no other thoughts of their Messiah, but of a mighty temporal prince" (140[82]). According to Locke, at the time when Jesus made his appearance, the Jewish nation was in a state of political agitation that was tinged with extraordinary religious hopes. The population was gripped by the expectation that God would imminently send them a leader whose "government and kingdom" would bring about their deliverance and usher in a new era. That era, which they alternatively referred to as the "Kingdom of God," the "Kingdom of Heaven," and the "Kingdom of the Messiah," was to be a time in which the Jews' political and material fortunes were to be miraculously reversed (38[22]; 53[29]; Dan. 9). Filled "with the expectation of a glorious earthly kingdom," they were looking for a new "RULER in Israel" (59[33]) who would not only liberate them from the Romans, but who would also "raise their nation into a higher degree of power, dominion, and prosperity than ever it had enjoyed" (140[82]). They anticipated that their Messiah would miraculously transform them from a people whose lot was to be continually subjugated by one foreign power after another into a new and eternal Rome. Their prophecies said of the Messiah that "all people, nations, and languages should serve him," and they expected that when he finally came God would grant them an "everlasting dominion," apparently over the entire world (59[33]; Dan. 7:13-14). Moreover, and perhaps most importantly, they believed that this would be the beginning of an era of (bodily) immortality: they expected that "the just should be raised from the dead to enjoy in that 'new world' a happy eternity with those of the Jewish nation who should be then living" (148[88]).

(51[28],105[57]).

Now, it was in this atmosphere of boiling political and messianic hopes that Jesus first entered onto the scene. At that time the imminent coming of the Messiah was "the general expectation," (53[29-30]) and many among the Jews "thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear" (54[30]; Luke 19:11)—a phenomenon which Locke says can be attributed to the fact that they "were under a foreign dominion, subject to the Romans" (58[32]). As Locke later informs us, the Jews were not only living under foreign occupation, but they were subject to the worst kind of tyranny, where the whims of a "jealous and cruel prince, who encouraged informations, and filled his reign with executions for treason" made life and property perpetually insecure (138[81]). In such an atmosphere, where freedom was absent, where hunger and poverty were widespread, and where people lived in a state of continual, gnawing fear, the hopes of finding "an extraordinary man" who was full of "divine power" and capable of performing miracles grew to exceeding heights (58[32]). Bowed by oppression and reduced to a state of utter helplessness, the Jewish masses began to follow Jesus because they came to believe that only a divine miracle could deliver them from their present misery. Indeed, as Locke narrates the history of Jesus' life, he is careful to catalogue the specific miracles which he performed, but it is curious to note that, almost without exception,[64] these all consist of the sudden alleviation of bodily pain or misfortune. Jesus heals the sick, he raises the dead, he cures the blind, the dumb, and the lame, and most importantly, he feeds the hungry (see, e.g., 87,90,91,96,100,101,116-17[47,48,49,51,52,53,64-5]). Locke twice notes that, because Jesus gave people bread, he attracted "multitudes that followed him

[64] The lone exception, if I am not mistaken, is his curing of the possessed (90[49]).

for the loaves" (103,144[54,85]). When he spoke to them of eternal life, as Locke rather comically puts it, he very often spoke "in a mixture of allegorical terms of eating, and of bread" (103[54]). The multitudes that followed Jesus, in other words, were driven not primarily by imaginary otherworldly hopes but by a very real temporal hunger, although this hunger may very well have led them to long for a state where such needs would no longer have to be satisfied. Upon being miraculously fed, they were ready to "set him up at the head of a tumult" and to force him to become a king (144[85]), for they thought they had finally found someone who could give them what they sought: "the grandeur of a temporal kingdom in this world, and the protection and prosperity they had promised themselves under it" (103[55]). According to Locke, it was only to confuse this mob and prevent it from forcing him to start a revolution that Jesus had recourse to rhetoric about another world and about eating his flesh instead of actual bread (103[55]).

Now, since Jesus' Gospel was preached to the poor, the first thing that his life and mission elucidates is the existence of a large class-divide within Jewish society. Locke presents Roman Judea as divided, roughly speaking, between a very poor and very hungry multitude, and a Romanizing Jewish elite (which is represented in this story chiefly by the Pharisees). Moreover, Locke indicates that in order to learn about the character of Jesus' followers, it is sufficient to look at the Apostles, who were in fact most representative of the poorest, least intelligent, and most destitute elements of this society. Thus, when Christ promised them that they would "eat and drink with me at my table, in my kingdom" (151[90]; Luke 22:29), the Apostles grossly misunderstood the character of that kingdom and even took his words literally, as evidenced by their

question to him after the resurrection: "Wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom unto Israel?" (149[89]; Acts 1:6). But, perhaps surprisingly, Locke gives Jesus enormous credit for shrewdly choosing "a company of poor, ignorant, illiterate men" to be his Disciples. They, like the rest of the masses, were mostly interested in attaining some combination of freedom and food, and Locke writes that they were predisposed to look for miracles precisely because they "were not of the 'wise and prudent' men of the world." Rather, as he astonishingly suggests, they were but "a company of poor, ignorant, illiterate men" who, with respect to matters of prudence and intelligence, were as "mere children." It was these child-like men who were "convinced by the miracles" which they saw Jesus do daily, and "though they, with others, expected a temporal kingdom on earth," they were not "too inquisitive after the time, manner, or seat of his kingdom, as men of letters, more studied in their rabbins, or men of business, more versed in the world, would have been forward to have been" (141[82-3]). Whereas smarter men would have questioned how anyone, let alone a poor carpenter, could lead a successful rebellion against one of the greatest empires the world has ever seen, this group of hungry and unintelligent riffraff was filled with a zealous and desperate confidence that Jesus could simply do so miraculously. Moreover, because he recognized their benign and simple natures, Jesus could be sure that they would do no more than what was asked of them, and that they could therefore be counted on not to say the wrong thing to the wrong people, thereby ruining his best laid plans.

But what exactly were those plans? This is something that Locke hints at only indirectly, and so to make sense of Jesus' character and motivations it may be best to

begin with an account of what sort of person Locke says that he was. Now, perhaps the first thing that comes to sight in this respect is how manifestly unlike the Apostles and the rest of his followers Jesus seems to have been. Where the Apostles were simple-minded and unquestioningly obedient, Jesus was shrewdly calculating and politically savvy. Locke paints Jesus as a master of rhetoric, who always knew just what to say and what not to say on each occasion, and most importantly, when to let his miracles do his talking for him. Throughout his career, he always picked just the right moment to retreat before danger presented itself—after performing miracles and attracting a following, he would withdraw to the hills before the authorities became suspicious, and he therefore wisely chose not to perform any miracles in the city of Jerusalem until his last days (see, e.g. 61-66[34-38]).

Now, according to Locke, Jesus employed his characteristic caution in order to escape from two main dangers, and in fact, it would seem perhaps that all of his actions can be explained once it is recognized that he had "an eye to" the "straitness" that was produced by their opposing pressures. As Locke cryptically summarizes his dilemma, Jesus had to create "new converts" on the one hand, while avoiding the traps posed to him by "captious Jews," on the other (121[70]). He needed to increase his following among the poor masses, but he needed to do so cautiously and judiciously, in such a way that would not allow their political passions to come to a head. For if they did, as previously noted, this riff-raff might "set him up at the head of a tumult" and force him to start a revolution.(144[85]; cf. also 74[42]). But while Jesus needed to fan the flame of revolution just to the point where it would be on the brink of burning out of control, he

also needed to demonstrate his innocence to the Romans—and not just simply so that he could protect himself. Thus, Locke also notes that he never claimed to be the King of the Jews within the hearing of the Romans or the Pharisees (137[80]). Instead, he spoke of a kingdom in another world in order to demonstrate that he was *genuinely* innocent of the sedition of which he was accused: he was well aware that "for a kingdom in another world, Pilate knew that his master at Rome concerned not himself" (71[39-40]). It was imperative that he "not die as a criminal and a traitor" (138[81]) but instead that he "be offered up [as] a lamb blameless and void of offense, his innocence appearing to all the world, even to him that delivered him up to be crucified" (74[42]; cf. also 62[35], 120[70]). It was for the sake of this goal, it appears, that his whole rhetorical strategy was directed, and it succeeded immensely. Pilate pronounced him innocent five times (136[79]), and he finally gave him over to be crucified "against his conscience" (138[81]) only when the Pharisees threatened to denounce him to Caesar—something which made it sadly necessary for him to look to "secure his own head" (137-38[80-81]).

Jesus, in other words, engaged in this strange and seemingly paradoxical behavior because he was seeking to become a martyr. He truly wanted to die, but to die innocent, satisfied not only in his own conscience but also in those of his own murderers that he was free of fault. But why? Locke provides a clear answer to this question in his *Second Vindication*: "It is evident from Scripture, that our savior despised the shame and endured the cross for the joy set before him; which joy, it is also plain, was a kingdom" (Locke 1823 [1963], 7: 235). As Locke will also make clear very shortly, God had promised Jesus "an everlasting kingdom in heaven" (178[109]), and "it is evident" that "he had

regard to" to this promise "in his sufferings" (177[109]). Jesus, in other words, appears in Locke's account to have been a man of great political ambition, but he was astute enough to realize that in the political atmosphere in which he found himself there was no this-worldly avenue for the satisfaction of his desires. If he had proclaimed himself king of the Jews and started a rebellion, that rebellion would surely have failed and would have "drawn on him the reputation and death of a turbulent, seditious malefactor" (74[42]). But if, on the other hand, he had tried to do his best within the confines of Judean society, he would have found his way blocked on all sides. As a poor man from Bethlehem, he would have had no access to the society of the Romanizing Pharisees, and at any rate, considering the post he attained, his ambitions certainly reached much, much higher than that. Drastically "straitened" on both sides and deprived of a more ordinary outlet, Jesus' ambition took a fanatical and otherworldly turn. He sought to give up his life in order to see his resplendent desires fulfilled in another world, just as his followers, who were cruder and less imaginative than he, originally sought to attain eternal life in this one.

Jesus, then, appears to be an exemplar of exactly that kind of religious spiritedness which Locke draws upon to a certain extent in the *Letter Concerning Toleration*, but which he is also attempting by and large to moderate in this work. Jesus' otherworldly ambitions provide a more intellectualized and high-aiming, and therefore also more instructive, example of the desire for salvation that animated his followers—and it is worthwhile to consider what form such a desire would take in a Lockean middle class society in which a poor man from Bethlehem would have a greater opportunity to

rise up in the world. Locke's description of the social condition of the Jews at the time when Jesus appeared, after all, seems to link the development of religious hopes, and the belief in miracles, to conditions of material desperation, political oppression, and intellectual backwardness. Among Jesus' poor and downtrodden followers, the desire for another life—or for an eternal extension of this one—seems to have resulted from a combination of poverty, tyranny, and ignorance—and this ignorance, of course, may give one cause to question whether the miracles which so impressed these people were genuine. If Jesus was so shrewd, after all, might he not have known how to play on the fears and superstitions of the multitude in order to convince them that he could produce bread from thin air, or even that he had risen from the dead? But however that may be, Locke's suggestion in this section would seem to be this: in a society that is more comfortable, more prosperous, and more free, one should not expect people like Jesus to attract a following. Indeed, if the most astute and ambitious are given a safer outlet for their desires, one should not expect such people to appear in the first place.

LOCKE'S CIVIC THEOLOGY

Having completed his subtle critique of the New Testament and of the version of Christianity contained within it, Locke is now ready to draw the blueprints for a liberal theology which can replace it. His loosening of Christianity's doctrinal requirements—which he will soon extend even further—has reduced the place of belief to one of practical irrelevancy, to "mere" belief, and the debunking character of his analysis of the

Gospels seems intended to sew doubts, if only among a certain segment of his readers, about Jesus' divinity. Accordingly, the theology which Locke now articulates seems to understand itself as a well-intentioned form of propaganda, as a lesson for the "illiterate bulk of mankind" (1[4-5]) that is not privy to that debunking, and its main substantive teaching is that eternal life is a reward for righteous living, or for conforming "our actions to the law of God" by "doing works meet for repentance" (171[105]). This theology, in other words, has an unmistakably civic character. Not only does it instruct believers to regard Jesus "as their King" and eternal life as their reward for fulfilling their promises of "obedience to him" (168[104]), but it also seems to teach them to look upon religion in the same way, and as serving the same purposes, as the liberal state. If the old Christianity, in other words, ultimately came to sight as unreasonable because its emphasis on faith failed to respect and even undermined what is politically necessary, the new faith will show itself to be reasonable precisely because it is oriented towards the maintenance of human societies. Locke can thus speak of the "reasonableness, or rather necessity" (172[105]) of the New Covenant because, according to his rationalism, the dominant role played by the pursuit of advantage leads human beings to look upon law as something that exists because it is necessary, and a reasonable law is therefore synonymous with a necessary one. But of course, getting people to view *divine* law in this way would seem to require bringing their theological views into line with their political ones, and so Locke's first step in outlining a rationalized Christianity is to paint a picture of a theological universe in which God and the other divine beings exhibit the same passions and attachments to their own self-interest as mankind.

Seeming, in effect, to begin the book anew, Locke now provides another account of the Fall, but this time he begins from the premise—which was entirely absent from the similar discussion in the work's opening pages—that Adam was "the Son of God" (173[106]). Adam "was immortal," Locke now informs us, because he shared in this aspect of "the likeness and image of his Father." Eternal life, in other words, was something he inherited. But after he transgressed his Father's command, he "forfeited that state of immortality" and so could not pass it down to his descendents, who were all therefore born "mortal, like their father" (179[106]). God, as any angry parent might do, disowned Adam and cut him out of His will, and so mankind from that point on had no more right to eternal life than the heir of a disinherited son would have to lay claim to the property of his grandfather. Eventually, however, God, "out of his infinite mercy" became "willing" (though interestingly Locke does not say 'desiring') "to bestow eternal life on mortal men," and to make this possible he sent Jesus into the world (174[106]). Now Jesus, according to Locke, was conceived "in the womb of a virgin . . . by the immediate power of God" and so "was properly the Son of God" (174[106]). He therefore enjoyed the same immortality as all those "who were the immediate sons of God" and who had not "forfeited that sonship by any transgression" (175[106]).[65] Jesus "was the heir of eternal life, as Adam should have been, had he continued in his filial duty" (175[107]). Had Adam remained faithful, he would have bequeathed eternal life to his descendents, and Jesus' chief accomplishment has been to put this error right by bringing human beings quite literally back into God's family. For, according to Locke,

[65] Locke's rather comic theology in this section therefore appears to be quietly polytheistic and

Jesus made it possible for men to become "his brethren" and fellow sons of God "by adoption" (175[107]). As God's children, Christians are also "joint-heirs with Christ " (175[107]; Romans 8:15-7) and they are therefore entitled "to share in that inheritance, which was his natural right" (175[107]).

Now this line of argument, of course, hardly captures what faithful Christians mean when they speak of themselves as children of God or brothers of Christ. In what now appears to be an extremely comic (and blasphemous) section of the work, Locke dares to recast God's gift of immortality to Jesus and eventually to mankind as an issue of inheritance in accordance with his own teaching about filial duty and paternal responsibility. According to that teaching, as it is outlined in Chapter Six of the *Second Treatise of Government*, the only way for parents to ensure the loyalty of their children is through their power to dispose of their property, and the strongest motive for children to remain obedient is their hope of attaining that reward. Such self-regarding and even mercenary motives, Locke now asserts, guided God and Jesus in their relationships with one another, and they ought also to guide us in our attitude toward both of them. Locke begins to indicate this when he says that God, after having a son again at long last, decided "*for his sake*" (175[107], emphasis added) to allow men to become immortal too. Like any ordinary father, God's foremost concern was not for us, who were as perfect strangers to Him, but for the well-being of His newly born child. He wanted to bequeath to Jesus not just immortality but also "an everlasting kingdom in heaven" (178[109]). Well aware of this, as previously noted, Jesus endured death on the cross because he

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anthropomorphic, for he nowhere says that Adam and Jesus were God's only "immediate sons."

knew that his sacrifice would be amply rewarded, and just before his final breath he called out to his Father and demanded the kingdom which was to be "given him upon this account of his obedience, suffering, and death," saying "the hour is come; glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee . . . I have glorified thee on earth: I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do" (177[109]; John 17:1-4). God and Jesus, in other words, had a deal: Jesus was to spread God's glory on Earth in return for a kingdom in heaven, and now that he has fulfilled his end of the bargain, Jesus does not shy from telling his father to pay up. Neither party to this contract was concerned chiefly with the well-being of the other, and certainly not with any third party, although we human beings stand to benefit a great deal incidentally. This is because if God had allowed the old, unforgiving law of works to remain intact, Jesus' kingdom would have had no subjects and there would have been no one "to sing praises unto his name" (178[110]). It was therefore "out of his mercy to mankind, *and for the erecting of the kingdom of his Son, and furnishing it with subjects*" (178[110], emphasis added) that God, "for his Son's sake," decreed that all those who were to "enrol themselves" in Jesus' kingdom, "profess themselves his subjects, and consequently live by the laws of his kingdom" could have their sins forgiven them and join Jesus in eternal life (178[110-11]).[66]

The picture of the divine cosmos which Locke here provides appears to be a tongue in cheek attempt to describe what Christian theology would look like if it were to conform entirely to the principles of his rationalism, and it also therefore seems to be an

[66] As Rabieh summarizes the teaching of this section, God's mercy to mankind took the form not of a love for us but only of a desire to do what was necessary "to set up his son in the family business" (Rabieh 1991, 954).

allegorical way of conveying his serious view of just what, according to that rationalism, the driving forces behind human psychology are. In contrast to the traditional Christian teaching, which holds that Jesus sacrificed himself out of love for mankind, Locke insists that he endured death as a price worth paying for the great reward which he coveted. This, he seems to suggest, is as close as one can get to sacrifice in a world in which men "cannot be hindered" from pursuing their happiness (245[149]). Indeed, this frank acceptance of the unavoidability of selfishness is the cornerstone of Locke's new religious teaching, which instructs human beings to look upon eternal life purely as "the reward of justice or righteousness" (180[111]). Locke's Jesus assumes the role of a monarch who doles out benefits in another world in exchange for good behavior in this one, and because he is concerned with works rather than faith, that is, with what we do and not with what we think, he cares not a whit whether we obey him solely to obtain this reward. On the contrary, such calculations on the part of the individual would appear to be not only acceptable but even necessary, for nobody, Locke implies, can be counted on to obey any law for its own sake. Jesus' great achievement, he states, was to make "the eternal law of right" (180[112]) effectual by backing it up with rewards and punishments, for without such sanctions that law would be "but empty talk, without force, and without influence" (185[114]). Even though the natural law is ostensibly "of eternal obligation" (180[112]), that law's inability to enforce itself, together with the inescapably self-interested character of human beings, means that we should by no means expect eternal obedience to it. Rather, wherever that selfishness is not kept in check by the artificially imposed prospect of reward and punishment, human beings will acknowledge no moral

constraints and there will result an "introducing and authorizing [of] irregularity, confusion, and disorder in the world." As Locke will soon make clear at greater length, Christ's most important accomplishment was to bring order to this chaos and "to reform the corrupt state of degenerate man" (180[112]) by endowing justice with external sanctions. Recognizing that humankind lacked any mechanism for restraining its natural and inescapable selfishness, he curtailed that selfishness precisely by appealing to it.

Locke's criticism of Biblical Christianity therefore seems to be that it suffers from a delusion which is characteristic of traditional morality more generally: nobody, he suggests, can be expected to forego the pursuit of his own happiness, although such restraints as are necessary for social harmony can be provided by recognizing and building upon that desire. Accordingly, his theology seeks not only to marry justice and advantage through the prospect of another life, but also to propagate a new moral teaching that can both liberate and moderate self-interest while we live here. Not surprisingly, Locke discovers that moral teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, where anyone would expect to find the details of Christian ethics most clearly laid out. Here, as Locke recalls, Jesus claimed not to make new laws but merely to confirm and reinforce "all the moral precepts in the Old Testament." He explained the Old Law, or the "eternal law of right," in "its full and clear sense" by freeing it from the "corrupt and loosening glosses of the Scribes and Pharisees" (188[115]). Having said this, one might expect that Locke would now go on to quote a substantial portion of Christ's words from the Sermon, but he instead provides us with a rather brief and cursory summary of them. In Locke's synopsis, Jesus tells his audience "that not only murder, but causeless anger, and

so much as words of contempt, were forbidden. He commands them to be reconciled and kind towards their adversaries: and that upon pain of condemnation."

> [He] not only forbids actual uncleanness, but all irregular desires, upon pain of hell-fire; causeless divorces; swearing in conversation, as well as forswearing in judgment; revenge; retaliation; ostentation of charity, of devotion, and of fasting; repetitions in prayer, covetousness, worldly care, censoriousness: and on the other side commands loving our enemies, doing good to those that hate us, blessing those that curse us, praying for those that despitefully use us; patience and meekness under injuries, forgiveness, liberality, [and] compassion (188[115]).

Now the language of each of these prescriptions is lifted directly from the King James Bible (especially Matthew 5 and Luke 6), and so it would be easy to miss the degree to which Locke's gloss on Jesus' words makes a series of suggestions which the Biblical Jesus never intended. The Jesus of the New Testament, for example, forbids becoming angry "without a cause" (Mat. 5:22), but he clearly implies that suffering injustice does not qualify as a legitimate pretext for indignation, for he also commands not resisting evil and turning the other cheek (Mat. 5:39; Luke 6:29). Locke's Jesus, on the other hand, does not call for this kind of self-abnegation. He counsels patience, compassion, and forgiveness to those who have been wronged, but he does not order one who has been robbed of his cloak to give up his coat also (Luke 6:29). Matthew's Jesus forbids all divorces "saving for the cause of fornication" (Mat. 5:32); Locke's forbids "causeless divorces" without specifying what those causes are, and he therefore seems to leave a great deal of room for such potential causes to proliferate. The Jesus of the New Testament, in short, calls for extreme self-denial and the total repression of the passions: he blesses the meek (Mat. 5:5), insists upon a complete disregard for outward possessions (Mat. 5:42), and prohibits even looking at a woman in lust ("and if thy right eye offend

thee, pluck it out" [Mat. 5:29]). Locke's Jesus enjoins none of these things, but rather limits himself to requiring civility, equanimity, and tolerance on the part of those who might feel themselves aggrieved.

Locke, in other words, under the guise of merely repeating the words of Jesus, is creating a list of transformed Christian virtues which will characterize the citizenry of a liberal republic. He removes from the Sermon on the Mount those old Christian virtues which call for extreme moral devotion and self-sacrifice, and he replaces them with new ones which promote tolerance, civility, and getting along with others. Instead of requiring a puritanical form of self-denial, Locke's new ethic merely prohibits "irregular" sexual desires—while apparently recognizing the need to protect the family as a necessary institution, it sees no need to do more than this or even to define what these "regular" desires are and thus what counts as a family. The Lockean Jesus commands fidelity to promises (not "forswearing in judgment"), not getting angry easily, forgiving one's competitors and neighbors, and, in general, being polite (not "swearing in conversation"). He does not mention charity as a virtue, but he does consider "ostentation of charity" to be a vice. Most notably, he nowhere praises piety, but he does condemn ostentation of devotion and of fasting, as well as "repetitions in prayer."[67] Those who live by this ethic, it would seem, will be self-absorbed but also easy-going; they will value whatever small fortunes they possess, but they will not think to increase them by violent or even overly-strenuous means. Although they will view all matters through the prism of their own self-interest, they will also expect others to do so as well,

and this frank recognition that the world is competitive will persuade them to accommodate themselves to others and thus to respect an ethic of civility and tolerance which occasionally calls for curtailing the pursuit of their own advantage. Since everyone has a right to seek his own happiness, so the thought goes, that right ought to extend only so far as it is consistent with that of everyone else to do the same.[68] Those who adopt his outlook will therefore have desires which are liberated but limited. They will satisfy them easily in marriage and family, rather than in grander and more socially disruptive outlets, but they will certainly not be tempted by any kind of asceticism. They will respect religion as socially important and even as necessary, but they will prefer to take it themselves in small or at most medium-sized doses. Not only will they no longer respect the old, self-abnegating Christian virtues, but they will likely look upon those who display them as excessively moralistic, as adhering to them for the sake of their own pride and self-esteem, and they may even suspect them of being hypocrites like the Pharisees who are lining their pockets in secret while preaching charity in public. Above all, they will likely be suspicious of religious zeal as something socially disruptive, and while they will remain easy-going but not necessarily indifferent, they will regard being judgmental (or "censorious") as the new cardinal sin.

Such, at any rate, appears to be the mindset that Locke expects to bring about by engaging in this rather loose analysis of Jesus' moral teaching. By removing the all-demanding and self-sacrificial character of the Christian virtues, Locke seems to hope

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[67] The New Testament's Jesus warns against ostentation and "vain repetitions" in prayer, but he does so in the name of sincere, inward piety (Mat. 6:5-8). Locke's Jesus draws no such contrast.

[68] For the potential origins of this thought in Locke and other thinkers, see Bolotin 2007.

also to remove their capacity to encourage zealotry and persecution. His Jesus delivers the comforting message that there is rarely if ever a need to make sacrifices, and he therefore could not be farther from the one found in the Gospels, who, as Locke himself now acknowledges, "commands self-denial, and the exposing ourselves to suffering and danger . . . upon pain of losing our souls" (191[116-7]). Indeed, as if to indicate the great gulf that lies between his own moral thinking and that of the New Testament, Locke follows his summary of the Sermon on the Mount with a series of long quotations from the Bible which convey the self-abnegating message of the authentic, pre-Lockean Jesus. This Jesus commands his followers to "Give alms, of such things as ye have," to "beware of covetousness," and to "be not fearful, or apprehensive of want" (196[118]; Luke 12:15, 22, 32-48). He states that "Whosoever exalteth himself, shall be abased: and he that humbleth himself, shall be exalted" (197[118]; Luke 14:11). Unlike Locke, who claims that only thoughts of reward can adequately ground morality, the Bible's Jesus asserts that the only virtuous actions are those which are undertaken with no regard for benefit whatsoever. "When thou makest a dinner, or supper, call not thy friends, or thy brethren . . . lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee," but call instead "the poor and maimed, the lame and the blind," precisely because "they cannot recompense thee." Here the difference between Locke and the Biblical Jesus could not be clearer, for while Jesus does indeed promise that "thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just," he does not come near following Locke in teaching that that reward should be foremost in one's mind (198[118-9]; Luke 14:12-4).

By recording these passages without comment, and thus also without his own endorsement, Locke allows the reader to see the difference between his own, mercenary moral teaching, and that of the Jesus of the Gospels, which can perhaps be summarized by the declaration that "whosoever . . . is not ready to forego all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple" (199[119]; Luke 14:33). Indeed, this difference is perhaps most clearly highlighted in the one instance in which Locke does offer a brief (and almost comically inadequate) interpretation of Jesus' words. To understand Christ's instruction to "sell all that thou hast, and give it to the poor" (203[119]), Locke writes, we must recognize that Jesus, when delivering this message, is attempting to test whether his interlocutor at the time really believes him to be the Messiah. Jesus' demand that he sell his possessions and give the proceeds to charity was therefore not an addition to the moral law or a "standing law of his kingdom" but only "a probationary command to this young man; to try whether he truly believed him to be the Messiah, and was ready to obey his commands" (203[120]). In other words, Locke claims that Jesus intended this message of extreme self-denial only for this one specific historical person. For us—who presumably need no such test of faith—selflessness is not necessary and simple obedience to the moral law is sufficient for our justification.

But if that is the case, one may be tempted to ask why it is even necessary to believe in the single article that Jesus is the Messiah. For if Christ, after all, punishes people not "for unbelief, but only for their misdeeds" (222[126]), it would seem quite unreasonable for him to deny immortality to virtuous people who lived before his time or who otherwise have no access to the Gospel. This, not surprisingly, is an objection which

Locke now grants, and he declares that those who wonder what is to become of such people are asking a question whose answer "is so obvious and natural" that it is not even worth asking. Since nobody "was, or can be required to believe, what was never proposed to him to believe" (228[128]), Christians are not the only ones who have access to eternal life.[69] Of course, Locke's guiding assumption until this point has been that because reason or the law of nature demands that all who sin in even the most trifling way deserve death, immortality is not a right but a privilege that is reserved only for the faithful. Now, however, Locke reverses himself and completely repudiates this view: "the light of reason," he now insists, has made clear to all who would make use of it not that God is harsh and punitive but that He is "good and merciful" (231[133]).[70] The eternal law of right teaches not that punishment is eternal but "that a man should forgive, not only his children, but his enemies, upon their repentance," and so it also indicates that God, "the author of this law," will "forgive his frail offspring" if they ask Him to. Unassisted reason, Locke thus suggests, has made clear that the possibility of immortality is open to us, although "the revelation of the Gospel" also endorses this, and should thus be acknowledged, because it has said "nothing to the contrary" (232[133]).

This last, surprising statement, appears to suggest that the New Testament has now become largely superfluous in Locke's thinking: at best it enjoys its authority only because it fails to contradict what reason declares to be "obvious and natural." Locke is

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[69] The extension of grace which Locke now carries out is jarring, and it sits uneasily with the view that Locke believed that only Christians have access to salvation. Thus, Spellman suggests that Locke could not have been entirely serious about this (1988, 142). Cf. also Dunn 1984, 85, who fails even to notice this passage.

therefore very far from his opening promise to read the Bible literally and on its own terms, and he has in fact come around to embrace a version of the natural theology which he once denounced. Indeed, as if to underscore this, he now acknowledges that some are likely to object to his teaching by pointing to a passage in Scripture that declares Jesus to be "the only true Messiah" and the sole way to salvation (233[133-4]; Acts 4:12). But although Locke records this objection, he never responds to it, and it is left hanging as a reminder of the orthodox position from which he is breaking. The official teaching which he comes to at the close of his long examination of the Bible is that the only faith required for immortality is a belief that God is "a rewarder" of those who obey Him (228[130]; Hebrews 11:6). Again appealing to the authority of Paul, he writes that Abraham's faith "was counted to him for righteousness" because he never doubted that God would grant him those "temporal blessings" which were specified in the covenant which they had made together (228[129-30]; cf. 24-5[16]). Abraham was saved, in other words, because he never doubted that God would deliver those benefits which made his obedience worthwhile. This, indeed, is the final definition of faith which Locke presents, and it is so generalized and capacious that it makes the single article which he spent over a hundred pages describing seem parochial by comparison. Since, as Locke insists, the possibility of immortality is made apparent by reason as well as revelation, anyone, whether with access to the Bible or not, can make a personal agreement with God that promises rewards in return for virtue. Indeed, this is why Paul (at least according to

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[70] This condition thus seems to make salvation available to the third group whom Locke does not explicitly discuss here: non-Christians who have access to the Gospel. Later in the work he will effectively subsume Islam (and by implication, Judaism) under the heading of Christianity (239[137]).

Locke's summary) taught that the faith of pre-Christian believers "was *nothing but* a steadfast reliance on the goodness and faithfulness of God, for those good things, which either *the light of nature*, or particular promises, had given them grounds to hope for" (229[131], emphasis added).

THE NECESSITY OF CHRISTIANITY

At this point in the work, then, Locke appears to have guided his reader towards a substantial but by no means total liberation from Biblical Christianity. And although the civic intentions behind his new definition of faith might seem to be somewhat transparent, Locke nonetheless appears to expect his intended audience to begin to accept a version of natural theology that contains a teaching about otherworldly rewards and punishments. He seems to look forward to the day when a new kind of believer who takes pride in being guided by reason will look down on revealed theology for its parochialism and for its tendency to beget persecution and will instead admire natural theology for its universal message of decent ethical living (cf. *Essay* III.9.23). But of course, since that moral message is founded upon the hope for immortality, this whole line of argument compels one to ask how Locke can claim with such certainty that reason indicates the existence of a providential God. As previously mentioned, we appear to stand in need of that very proof that Locke never provides in the *Essay*. Moreover, it would seem to be precisely here, in a book entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity, as Delivered in the Scriptures*, that we should expect to find a clear and cogent

demonstration showing not only that reason can confirm the existence of *a* God, but moreover that it can discover the providential and miracle-performing God of the Bible—or at least a more universalized, Lockean version of Him. Such a task would appear to be the obvious next step in Locke's argument, but instead of undertaking it he turns to a different but related problem. Why is it, he asks, that we need a savior? "What advantage have we by Jesus Christ" (234[134])? Now this question, of course, would have come across as shocking to say the least if it had been asked at the opening of the book. But having since reduced faith in Christ first to a mere precondition for eternal life and then to something utterly redundant, Locke has taken his reader step by step to the point where he can find the guiding assumption of the book thus far to be perplexing and even absurd. If the law of faith, once it has been filtered through Locke's new natural theology, no longer requires a belief in Christ, why should we care about him in the first place? Might we even be able to get along without any kind of revealed religion at all?

This question of what advantage we have by Jesus Christ, and thus also by Christian revelation, will guide Locke through the remainder of the work, and it would seem inextricably linked to the more fundamental question of how reason can demonstrate God's otherworldly providence. Indeed, one possible answer to this latter question might be that we need revelation precisely because we have no natural knowledge of the existence of the Biblical God. Although this would seem to be the kind of thing that one would expect to hear from a certain kind of pre-Lockean believer, Locke nonetheless seems to endorse it when he gives his first explanation, if one can call it that, of the reason for Jesus' coming. Remarkably, he says that it should be "reply enough"

simply to say that our "short views" and weak understandings cannot account for it (235-6[134]). Now of course, since reason by definition cannot accept such a proposition dogmatically, this explanation is far from satisfying. In fact, it appears to pull the rug out from under Locke's promise to demonstrate the rational character of Christ's revelation, and it may be a quiet indication that he actually cannot satisfy the demand of those who are seeking a demonstration of God's providence. The religion of reason, in other words, may not be so reasonable after all, and the majority of those who accept it may not recognize the degree to which their outlooks rest on unproven dogmas. But what of those few individuals who are aware of this and who refuse to ground their opinions on such "borrowed or begg'd foundations" (*Essay* I.4.25)? What of those progenitors of Enlightenment rationalism for whom Locke claims to have written this work? Might there be a genuinely compelling reason for them to follow him in claiming that reason wholly endorses Christianity? For those who cannot be satisfied simply with his assurances, Locke offers a second explanation which he says has the "wherewithal to satisfy the curious and inquisitive," and this explanation concerns the "great and many advantages we receive" by Jesus' coming as well as the "need" for it (236[134-5]). Recalling his previous promise to show the "reasonableness, or rather necessity" of Christianity (172[105]), we may be prompted to ask whether there is a reasonable need to propagate a belief in such things as our understandings cannot account for. Might Christianity, in other words, be 'reasonable' in the sense that it can deliver something which reason requires but which it cannot itself provide?[71]

[71] This possibility would seem to account for Locke's earlier reversal of his position on the question of

Locke, at any rate, appears to lend credence to such suspicions when his tone becomes suddenly dogmatic. There is undeniable "evidence of our Saviour's mission from heaven," he proclaims, "in the multitude of miracles he did before all sorts of people," so much so that Jesus' words "cannot but be received as the oracles of God, and unquestionable verity" (237[135]). Although Locke has been steadily guiding his reader towards a liberation from Biblical Christianity and an openness to a seemingly uncompromised reliance on natural reason, he now reverses himself completely and insists on the need for a belief in miracles. And yet, the character of the liberation which he has been working towards makes it extremely difficult to take him seriously when he claims that Christ's miracles were so self-evidently divine that "they never were, or could be denied by any of the enemies or opposers of Christianity" (237[135]). Indeed, since "where the miracle is admitted, the doctrine cannot be rejected,"[72] it is hard to see how it is even logically possible for Christianity's opponents to have accepted Jesus' miracles. Locke goes so far as to say that the veracity of these miracles was not even questioned by "Julian himself: who neither wanted skill nor power to inquire into the truth," and who would not "have failed to have proclaimed and exposed it, if he could have detected any falsehood in the history of the Gospel" (240[138]). But of course, if Julian the Apostate had actually believed in the divinity of Christ, it is deeply perplexing that he continued to persecute Christians instead of, like Paul, becoming one himself. On the contrary, he did

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whether the law of nature mandates forgiveness (231[133]). If reason or the maintenance of human societies requires that humans come to believe that virtue is rewarded in the hereafter, then it would also require them to believe in a forgiving God. If this is true, then it would imply that both the punitive God of the Old Testament and the Jesus of the New Testament (who threatens the sinful with eternal damnation) left people no hope and were thus apt to unleash rather than restrain the "lawless exorbitancy of unconfined man."

exactly what Locke says he did not do: he wrote and published an anti-Christian critique.[73] As several commentators have noted, Locke's description of his attitude therefore appears to be plainly ironic (Rabieh 1991, 950; Zuckert 2002, 161), and his example would seem to provide a quiet indication that those who lack neither "skill nor power to inquire into the truth" should actually be led by their unassisted reason *away* from a belief in miracles and in the Christian God.

But if Locke's more subtle teaching may be meant to encourage a great deal of religious doubt, it also seems to indicate the need to keep that doubt confined to a small segment of the population. His comments about Julian at first appear to be almost irresponsibly transparent, but they are quickly overshadowed by repeated assertions that the contents of Biblical revelation are wholly rational (241[140]) and that "the works of nature . . . sufficiently evidence a Deity" (238[135]). Indeed, here, as in the *Essay*, Locke's rhetorical strategy is to swamp the reader with dogmatic statements about the harmony that exists between reason and revelation (Pangle 1988, 215). Moreover, this strategy seems to be recommended here to future rationalists in the person of his revised version of Julian, who was a vigorous seeker after truth but who nonetheless made sure to endorse Christ's miracles when speaking in public. For, as Locke states in a very pregnant passage in the *Essay*, even if the truth of revelation is doubtful, the inseparable connection that exists between morality and divine reward and punishment should still lead anyone who recognizes this to "cry up that for Sacred; which if once trampled on, and prophaned, he himself cannot be safe nor secure." The safety and happiness of every

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[72] *A Discourse of Miracles* (Locke 1823 [1963], 9:259).

man therefore requires that he "recommend, and magnifie" those rules of moral virtue "to others" from which "he is sure to reap Advantage to himself" (*Essay* I.3.6). In this respect, Locke suggests, the behavior of philosophers should be no different, and indeed, he hints that they may even have a special role to play in providing men with "a clear knowledge of their duty" (241[138]).

Now of course, Locke's main teaching in this final section holds that it was Christianity, rather than philosophy, which was able to bring this knowledge of duty to mankind. Prior to Jesus, as he writes, "human reason unassisted failed men in its great and proper business of morality" (241[140]). For a variety of reasons, philosophy could not inculcate an effectual and lasting code of ethics, and so it was only after the coming of Christ and the advent of his new religion that morality was finally placed upon its "true foundations" (243[144] with Locke 1999, 154 and Rabieh 1991, 943 n. 9). Yet, considering Christianity's historical tendency to produce "schisms, separations, contentions, animosities, quarrels, blood and butchery,"[74] it seems much more likely that Locke's praise of Jesus in this section is actually a praise of himself. It is Locke, after all, who is attempting to make Christianity more humane and tolerant and who, by reinterpreting the Bible in a way that links salvation to works rather than faith, is propagating a new religion that promises to make virtue "the best bargain" (245[150]). In doing this, Locke seems to be going well beyond "Plato, and the soberest of the [ancient] philosophers," who "were fain, in their outward professions and worship, to go with the herd, and keep to the religion established by law." For although Locke in one

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[73] *Against the Galileans* (Julian 2004).

sense follows their example by claiming to believe in miracles when speaking in public, in another sense he rejects it, for the *Reasonableness* as a whole utilizes such rhetoric not merely for self-protection but instead to challenge and to attempt to reform the religion that is established by law in his own time. Now Locke does not explicitly say why Plato and soberest of the philosophers chose to "go with the herd," but his invocation of the fate of Socrates (238[136]) suggests, quite plausibly, that they did so to protect themselves. They employed this rhetorical strategy, it would appear, because they recognized how precarious the place of philosophy was in the ancient world. And yet, Locke's suggestion seems to be that by simply hiding themselves and hoping not to be exposed, these philosophers did little more than eke out an existence on the margins of society. Rather than take the initiative to make themselves less vulnerable, they left their fates in the hands of fortune or of the good graces of the cities in which they lived.

Somewhat paradoxically, then, Locke seems to be suggesting that ancient philosophy would have looked after its own security much more adequately if it had only displayed more courage and attempted to replace "the religion established by law" with one that was more friendly to itself. After all, what could do more to protect philosophy than for it to teach men about their moral duties (which of course would include the duty to tolerate those with unorthodox religious opinions)? Classical philosophy "failed men in its great and proper business of morality," it would therefore appear, because it never had "authority enough to prevail on the multitude" (238[135]). Whether for lack of ability or lack of interest, it never acquired the public role that would have been needed to

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[74] *Second Vindication* (Locke 1823 [1963] , 7:358).

teach men "what was good and evil in their actions" (241[139]). In pagan antiquity, this would have meant replacing a corrupt religious outlook which emphasized ceremony to the exclusion of all else with a monotheistic one that was concerned only with virtue (241[138-9]; 238[136]). Now this, of course, is exactly what Locke is attempting to do,[75] and his criticism of ancient philosophy seems to be that, rather than attempt to engage in a project of cultural transformation through the use of propaganda or myth-making, it was content to retreat from society and to keep its deepest insights to itself while taking care to guard its speech in public.[76]

But assuming once again that Locke's intended careful reader is a student of the more radical, Spinozistic branch of the Enlightenment, his analysis would appear to invite the following response. Even if one grants to Locke that the vast majority of human beings need to believe in a providential God who can provide incentives for virtue, does not philosophy pay too high a price by presenting itself in a manner that actively encourages that belief? Although his theological writings were controversial during his lifetime, Locke was received well in the century after he wrote, and as mentioned at the opening of this chapter, his version of toleration has become the classic liberal teaching

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[75] If it is true, as previously suggested, that Locke's praise of Jesus' moral message is actually a praise of the one contained in his own religious teaching, then his description of the role of priests in the ancient world, where "religion was every where distinguished from, and preferred to virtue" (241[139]), would seem to be an allegorical description of medieval or pre-Lockean Christianity.

[76] Perhaps because of this, in Locke's estimation it may be unclear just what the deepest insights of classical thought were. Locke says, for example, that Socrates was killed by the Athenians because "he laughed at their polytheism, and wrong opinions of the Deity," but he does not say what Socrates considered the right opinions on that subject to be. While he notes that "Plato, and the soberest of the philosophers" tended to speak exoterically in public, he also indicates that they never made it quite clear what they actually thought about "the nature and being of the one God" (238[136]). To Locke, the caution employed by ancient philosophers may have kept their truest opinions in impenetrable obscurity, with the result that they were ultimately hidden from posterity.

on the separation of church and state. But whether his solution has tended to foster the flourishing of the kind of life that he himself led is another matter entirely. After visiting America, Tocqueville could write that there is no country in the world less occupied with philosophy than the United States (Tocqueville 2000, 403). By presuming that morality is reason's "great and proper business," in other words, did Locke not run the risk of making philosophy the servant of liberal-democracy instead of (as Spinoza would have it) the other way around? Indeed, unlike Spinoza, Locke abandoned philosophy's claim to be the *summum bonum*, and, endorsing the same kind of relativism as Hobbes (*Essay* II.21.55), claimed that the most that science could do is offer "Advantages of Ease and Health" to "increase our stock of Conveniences for this Life" (*Essay* IV.12.10). The same concern for the public good which leads Lockean political philosophy to bow to revelation also leads it to transform itself into the modern, technologically driven project to conquer nature for the relief of man's estate. Spinoza's political philosophy would therefore seem to be an appealing alternative because it refuses to make such compromises, and indeed, it promises to show how a democratic regime—and one which is perhaps more radically open than Locke's—can preserve and foster intellectual greatness.

Chapter 4: Spinoza's High-Aiming Liberalism

"Such are the opinions of the Americans; but their error is clear: for, it is proven to me daily in a very learned manner that all is well in America except precisely the religious spirit that I admire; and I learn that on the other side of the ocean the freedom and happiness of the human species lack nothing except to believe with Spinoza in the eternity of the world."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 281

Tocqueville claimed to have written a book about the United States because that country in his time was already making manifest the social and political consequences of the distinctly modern kind of democracy which he saw "advancing rapidly towards power in Europe." But he also famously noted that, as far as intellectual life was concerned, the "great democratic revolution" (Tocqueville 2000, 3) whose inevitability he predicted had thus far failed to reach its logical endpoint in America—for in that country at least, the influence of democracy on the realm of thoughts and ideas had been strangely arrested by the presence of Christianity. Indeed, even after noting the various modifications which the Americans had made to religion in order to accommodate it to their liberal regime, Tocqueville continued to describe it as an aristocratic inheritance which he thought would be extremely useful in the future for holding democracy back from its innate intellectual consequences (Tocqueville 2000, 519). As will be discussed more fully in the next chapter, the liberal-democratic piety which Tocqueville discovered in the United States closely resembled Locke's proposed civil religion, and he saluted it for its apparently successful ability to provide a transcendent backing for freedom which could also simultaneously keep in check the secularizing tendencies of democracy's natural

instincts. As the above quotation makes clear, those instincts were most clearly embodied in the radical, scientific, and anti-theological outlook that characterized the European intellectual elites of Tocqueville's time. And as Tocqueville himself here acknowledges, perhaps no name is more important among the founders of such thought than that of Benedict de Spinoza.

That Spinoza's philosophy is of crucial importance for an accurate understanding of contemporary liberal-democracy has been recognized through a recent re-awakening of interest in his social and political writings. Most forcefully, Jonathan Israel (2000, 2001 and 2006) has credited Spinoza with self-consciously seeking to start a covert, long-term project which he has termed the "Radical Enlightenment"—an attempt to topple the authority of monarchy and organized religion through the popular diffusion of ideas undermining the veracity, not just of this or that version of Christianity, but of all revelation and all belief in the supernatural. By corroding the popular belief in prophecy, in miracles, and in the unity and coherence of the Bible, Israel contends, the spread of Spinoza's thought dealt a fatal blow to the claim of divine right that constituted the central justification for the inequality and hierarchy characteristic of the *Ancien Régime*. Israel therefore credits Spinoza not only with initiating the revolution that would eventually overturn the political order and the way of life that Tocqueville refers to as "aristocracy," but also with bringing into being the wholly secular kind of politics, and the nearly limitless toleration, which characterizes liberalism today.[77]

[77] According to Israel, because Spinoza's thought extended toleration to freedom of thought and expression, rather than simply to freedom of worship, and because he did not make that freedom conditional on church membership or on a desire to save one's soul, it is he, rather than Locke, who should

Because Locke's argument for toleration proclaims the necessity of a civil religion, Israel regards it as an untenable halfway house between the residues of medieval Christianity and what he takes to be the full-blown secularism—and indeed, the outright atheism—of Spinoza's thought (Israel 2006, 11-12, 37-8, 44-60). While this critique of the "moderate Enlightenment" may be unfair to Locke in some respects,[78] it does seem to have a certain historical validity, for in no Western liberal-democratic nation today does there exist the kind of civil religion for which Locke called. Public life in contemporary democracies has become secular in a way that would perhaps worry Locke. In America and Europe professed atheists are not denied the privilege of toleration, and the number of those who claim not to believe in God or to attend church at all is rapidly growing. At the same time, however, Israel's insistence that Spinoza ought to be understood as a

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be more properly credited with the origin of the dominant ideas—such as "democracy, freedom of thought and expression, individual freedom, comprehensive toleration, rule of law, equality, and sexual emancipation—which since the late nineteenth century have increasingly constituted the declared quintessential values of western 'modernity'" (Israel 2006, 42, 135-63; 2000; and 2001, 265-70; but on the limits of Lockean toleration cf. Tarcov 1999, 180-81). Because Israel finds in Spinoza the root of all modern secular thought, he also claims that the entirety of contemporary social science is "basically *Spinosiste*" (2006, 14). As evidence for Spinoza's plan to start a clandestine and revolutionary cultural and political movement, Israel cites, among other things, his attempts to diffuse his ideas to other members of his "atheistic circle" in Amsterdam—and to have them in turn spread these to others, though cautiously—as well as his probable involvement in seeking to have the *Theologico-Political Treatise* translated into French (Israel 2001, 163, 174, 302). For the tremendously successful impact which this diffusion had both on the liberal clergy and on ordinary people across Europe, see ibid. pp. 275-327. Other intellectual historians who have stressed the central importance of Spinoza's thought include Hazard 1953, Jacob 1981, and Popkin 1979. For a discussion of the circumstantial connections between Spinoza's ideas and those contained in the widely but illicitly circulated *Traité de Trois Imposteurs*, which argued that Moses, Jesus, and Mohammed were all pious-frauds, and which was alternatively titled *l'Esprit de Spinosa*, see Popkin 1992 ch. 8, who even goes so far as to speculate that Spinoza might have been involved in writing it (*ibid*. p. 147ff).

[78] Because Israel often presents Locke as a theologically-motivated and illiberal reactionary, he does not quite take seriously the critique of Spinozism's allegedly dangerous *political* tendencies which Locke presents. Although Israel often refers to Locke's view that human sociability requires the belief in an afterlife, he fails to notice Locke's attempt to preserve religion while changing it so as to make it more compatible with liberalism. Thus, because Israel does not consider the potential secular motivations for Locke's insistence on the need for a civil religion, he also does not take up the possibility that this insistence may be well-founded. See esp. Israel 2006, 135-63.

thinker whose primary purpose was to engineer a revolutionary cultural and political project seems to sit uneasily with his manner of life and writing. Indeed, while some recent scholars have stressed Spinoza's political intentions—and have sometimes construed these quite narrowly[79]—there is a long tradition of regarding him not as a political revolutionary but as a philosophic hermit.[80] Indeed, the most long-standing view of Spinoza among contemporary scholars tends to present his thought not as an attempt to change the world but as an endeavor to pursue a contemplative or even a mystical ideal—and to this end it tends to understand the *Theologico-Political Treatise* as at best ancillary to the mature philosophy contained in his *Ethics Demonstrated in Geometric Order*, a work in which Spinoza declares his intention to "consider human actions and appetites just as if it were a question of lines, planes, and bodies."[81]

The picture of his life and work which Spinoza left to posterity is therefore, to say the least, puzzling. Are we to regard him as the rebellious excommunicated Jew who painted his own self-portrait so as to resemble a Neapolitan revolutionary, or as the

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[79] Verbeek (2003, 133-4), for example, takes the *Theologico-Political Treatise* as concerned primarily with 17th century Dutch problems. Cf. also Smith 1997, 10, 19-20.

[80] Following this tradition, Nietzsche famously characterized Spinoza as a "sick hermit" for his apparent attempt to live a life characterized by a cold, pure, and disinterested dedication to mathematical truth (*Beyond Good and Evil*, #5).

[81] *Ethics* III, Preface (Spinoza 1996, 69; all references to the *Ethics* hereafter come from this translation). This denial of any political project on Spinoza's part can be found in Wolfson's classic study (1934). Wolfson claims that if Spinoza were made "of sterner stuff" and if he had lived a few centuries later, he "would have perhaps demanded the overthrow of the old order with its effete institutions so as to build upon its ruins a new society of a new generation raised on his new philosophy. He would then perhaps have become one of the first apostles of rebellion. But being what he was and living at a time when belief in the potency of reformation had not yet been shaken by doubt, he chose to follow in the footsteps of rationalizers throughout history" and remain aloof from involvement in theological and political controversies (Wolfson 1934, 2:330). The view that Spinoza had no historical influence and was not an Enlightenment figure has been more recently affirmed by Mason (1997), who, however, does not view him as a rationalist. For the view of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* as at best prefatory to the *Ethics*, see Curley 1990.

ascetic 'philosophic saint' who would come to be idealized in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries?[82] This dilemma has led at least one interpreter to conclude that Spinoza was somehow both of these—that his life was marked by frustrated efforts at democratic political reform followed by masochistic escapes into contemplative withdrawal, and that this schizophrenia, in turn, rendered his thought ultimately incoherent (Feuer 1958). The puzzle that is inherent in these two apparently irreconcilable sides of Spinoza would seem to be encapsulated in the following questions: assuming that Spinoza is a philosopher whose first loyalties lie with the discovery of truth, why, if at all, would he undertake to change society? And if his work does contain a project of religious and political reform, what relation could that have to his private theoretical endeavors?

These questions, in turn, appear to invite a consideration of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*, for not only is the avowed purpose of that work to found a democratic republic in which "each is permitted both to think what he wants and to say what he thinks" (20.T),[83] but, as Spinoza's subtitle makes clear, he intends for such a republic to be characterized first and foremost by "the Freedom of Philosophizing." If we take the word freedom here as it is often used in the *Treatise* and in the *Ethics*—as a term for the human perfection which is possessed by those few individuals who live a fully self-conscious and rational life—then it would appear that there exists a necessary link

[82] For Spinoza's self-portrait in the guise of Tommaso Aniello Masaniello, see Feuer 1958, 38-9.

[83] In this chapter I follow Yaffe's translation of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* (Spinoza 2004), which I refer to hereafter simply as the *Treatise*. I cite it by chapter, paragraph, and sentence number, which Yaffe helpfully provides ('T' refers to chapter titles, 'A' to the annotations which Spinoza appended to the end of

between theologico-political reform and genuine philosophic enlightenment. The nature of this link is as yet far from clear, but from a strictly political perspective it invites the following consideration: because its primary intention is to bring about the flourishing of intellectual freedom, rather than commercial or even political freedom, Spinoza's liberalism appears to be much more high-aiming than that of Locke. Against critics who contend that liberal-democracy in practice has resulted in few genuine intellectual or spiritual achievements, Spinoza promises to show that such a regime, if properly constructed, will lead to the advent of liberalism in its truest sense—that is, to the authentic spiritual liberation of a select few and therewith to the full flourishing of humanity at its peak.

If Spinoza's apparent profession of two contradictory attitudes toward political reform has engendered competing interpretations of his thought, the related problem of his religious beliefs has proven to be all the more controversial. Although Spinoza was almost universally regarded—or rather reviled—as an atheist in his own time, since the end of the eighteenth century he has also come to be seen, in Novalis' famous phrase, as a "God-intoxicated man."[84] Modern Spinoza scholarship is thus divided between interpreters who follow his contemporaries in regarding him as a covert unbeliever,[85] and

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the work). On a few occasions I have altered the translation slightly based on the Gephardt edition of the Latin text (Spinoza 1925, vol. 3).

[84] The authoritative interpretation of Spinoza for about a century was provided by Pierre Bayle, whose *Historical and Critical Dictionary* condemned his writings and called him the first ever "Systematical Atheist" (Bayle 1710, vol. 4, s.v. "Spinoza" [p. 6781]). For the early reception of Spinoza's work, see, e.g., Bagley 1999 and 2008, 40ff; Israel 1996 and 2001, 275-94. For the evolution of his reputation from that of an atheist to that of a pantheist mystic, see Beiser 1987, 44-108; Moreau 1996; Smith 1997, 11-13.

[85] See, e.g. Bagley 1999 and 2008; Gildin 1980. Hazard 1935; Israel 2006; Lachterman 1991; Popkin 1979; Smith 1997; Strauss 1965; Verbeek 2003; Yaffe 1999. In addition, based on the epigraph provided above, it would also seem justified to include Tocqueville in this list.

those who view him as a mystic of one kind or another.[86] Here again an analysis of the *Theologico-Political Treatise* promises to provide an insight into Spinoza's true views in a way that, at least initially, should be inviting to both sides in this debate. For in addition to proclaiming the need for a society in which "the Freedom of Philosophizing" is protected, the *Treatise's* subtitle also proclaims that that same freedom not only "can be Granted in keeping with Piety and the Peace of the Republic," but indeed, "that it cannot be removed unless along with that Peace of the Republic and that very Piety." Below the subtitle Spinoza affixes an epigraph from I John which proclaims that "Through *this*"—and the word "*hoc*" in the present context, if not in the Biblical one, appears to refer to the freedom of philosophizing—"we know that we remain in God and God remains in us: that he has given us of his spirit" (I John 4:13). By spotlighting this passage, Spinoza appears to find a Biblical endorsement for his own philosophic pantheism. The *Treatise*, in other words, is both a proposal for political reform and a religious apologetic.[87] In chapter 14, its theological teaching culminates in a lesson about the character of true piety and the way to salvation, and the work as a whole can therefore be seen as a defense of the conceptions of God and of human *beatitudo* which are found in the chapters 3 and 4 and in the *Ethics*.

But if Spinoza's *Treatise* is therefore meant to be a defense of true piety or true belief, it is all the more puzzling that in the work's preface he seems to present that piety

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[86] Feuer (1958), Huenemann (1999), Mason (1997), and Rice (1999) all regard Spinoza as accepting some form of supernatural or supra-rational authority. Donagan (1988 and 1996) regards Spinoza as a rationalist but believes he nonetheless accepted the possibility of "naturalized" miracles and revelation.

or belief as identical with a life of internal intellectual independence—with the "sound reason" or "doubting" which he juxtaposes to the "prejudices" that characterize the dominant religious outlooks of his time (P.2.4). So while Spinoza's political project is meant to provide a defense of his religious teaching and of its conception of human blessedness and the way to salvation, it also regards the latter as inseparable from a kind of skepticism or religious doubt. Indeed, as he presents it, it may be only by fostering such doubt that Spinoza can defend true religion, and make our age happy, by freeing it "of all superstition" (11.1.61). At the very least, it must be acknowledged that the theological and political sides of Spinoza's treatise are interwoven in a way that is far from obviously clear. To unravel these threads, it will be necessary to follow Spinoza's instructions and undertake an analysis of his argument as it unfolds over the course of the *Treatise's* twenty chapters (P.6.1).

Spinoza opens chapter 1 of the *Treatise* by endorsing the certainty of Biblical prophecy and therewith the authenticity of the revelation of the Mosaic Law (1.1.1; 1.7.1). He begins chapter 20, by contrast, with a critique of Moses' regime and with an argument for a polity in which speech and thought are free and in which commerce, rather than religion, cements the social bond (20.1.5; 20.6.4; Yaffe 1997, 160-62). Between these two endpoints, it therefore appears, Spinoza will outline the stages in a progressive education that will take his readers from Biblical theocracy to liberal-democracy. This project of enlightenment, moreover, appears to be conducted on two

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[87] In Epistle 30, which he wrote to Henry Oldenburg, Spinoza claimed that he was writing the *Theologico-Political Treatise* in part to vindicate himself "as far as I can" from the reputation for atheism which he had garnered among the common people (Spinoza 1995, 185-6).

levels: it attempts to lead a few select individuals to a philosophic liberation while simultaneously carrying out a cultural transformation of society as a whole. At the end of the preface Spinoza claims that his *Treatise* "will be useful through and through" for those "who would philosophize more freely" if they did not unfortunately "deem that reason has to serve as handmaid to theology" (P.6.2). Thus, as Leo Strauss writes, "the *Treatise* is Spinoza's introduction to philosophy" (Strauss 1965, 28). And yet, Spinoza also addresses his work to readers who are already philosophic (P.6.1) and who therefore require no such introduction. But a treatise on the education of potential philosophers could indeed be valuable for other philosophers—provided, of course, that they wish to learn how to provide such an education themselves. Indeed, it is precisely here that Spinoza's philosophic and political projects may come together, for it may be that by changing society, by moving it away from divine right monarchy and towards liberal-democracy, Spinoza intends to cultivate the genuine intellectual freedom of a select few. More specifically, by crafting a popular religious outlook—or a progressive series of outlooks—which will come ever closer to an approximation (though never to an exact replica) of his own philosophic perspective, Spinoza expects to permit a large number of people to shadow, and a few to achieve, the thoroughgoing philosophic liberation that he claims to have undergone himself.[88]

[88] For Spinoza's account of his own philosophic conversion, and of his intentions to aid others to achieve the same result, see the opening of his early, unfinished *Treatise on the Emendation of the Intellect* (Spinoza 1985, 7ff.).

POLITICS AND THE PROBLEM OF SUPERSTITION

If the twenty chapters that compose the body of the *Treatise* constitute the steps in a project of theologico-political reform, then it would seem that the purpose of the work's preface is to detail the causes that have driven Spinoza to carry out that reform by writing it (P.3.4). In the work's very first sentence, he indicates the problem to which he is responding, and he also appears to hint at what could perhaps be done to solve it. "If human beings could regulate all their affairs with certain counsel," he writes, "or if fortune were always favorable to them, they would not be bound by any superstition" (P.1.1). In keeping with his presentation of this work as a Christian apologetic, Spinoza indicates that his purpose in writing the *Treatise* has been to combat the danger posed by superstitious beliefs which are "adverse to religion"(P.1.4)—that is, primitive and idolatrous practices which were common among the ancient pagans and which he suggests are still unfortunately present among the lowest elements of society in his own time. Among the most vulgar and rustic, he indicates, there continues to exist a residue of Greco-Roman piety, a crypto-pagan kind of Christianity which holds that "God" communicates his decrees "not in the mind," but instead through the likes of entrails, the ravings of madmen, and bird-omens (P.1.5). According to Spinoza, these kinds of theological errors arise because human beings tend to long for "the uncertain goods of fortune . . . without measure" (P.1.2). Their hopes for the goods of this world—which, considering his example of Alexander the Great (P.1.7), may not necessarily be limited to those of the body or to creature comforts—are not restrained by a sense of the boundaries of the possible, and this constitutes the psychological illness of which superstition, so to

speak, is but a symptom. Assuming that it is not possible to render fortune always favorable, two other remedies would thus seem to hold some promise. The most effective cure would be a kind of stoicism, or a sober and thoroughgoing acceptance of the role of chance in human affairs. But since most people would seem to be incapable of such an attitude, it would appear that superstition could be dampened—but never entirely eliminated—if social arrangements ensured that people became, by and large, more fortunate. If adherence to a more "certain counsel" could make men less dependent on external circumstances, one could expect superstition to decline along with desperation.

But in a world such as the present one where human beings more often than not cannot attain what they long for, they find themselves swinging back and forth on a psychological pendulum between the extremes of "hope and dread" (P.1.2). At their lowest points, when they are in the grips of fear and when they see no way to fulfill their desires, they willingly "seek counsel on bended knees" from anyone, and they will believe any advice, no matter how idiotic, absurd, or vain it may be (P.1.3). The hope which they experience in the midst of their dread ignites a psychological engine which deludes them into thinking that they can escape their circumstances—and indeed, it would seem that this hope actually grows stronger among human beings the more the odds are stacked against them. But since the sole cause of superstition is dread (P.1.7), it has absolutely no presence at the other end of this psychological pendulum (P.1.8). On the contrary, when men find themselves in fortunate circumstances they become "overconfident, boastful and proud" (P.1.2). Entirely self-possessed, they not only spurn

all counsel but consider offers of it to be insulting (P.1.3), and for this reason they see no reason to turn to a belief in the supernatural.

Because superstition is rooted in a psychological reaction to bad fortune, it follows, according to Spinoza, that its origins are but a reflection of a natural desire which all men experience to seek out their own good. He thus insists that it is a part of superstition, but "adverse to religion," to propitiate God or the gods "with sacrifices and prayers" (P.1.4). Those who have obtained the objects of their longing (*cupiditate*) will never feel a desire to sacrifice some or all of what they have obtained. Unlike the superstitious, who "beg for divine help with prayers and womanish tears" because they "are unable to be of help to themselves" (P.1.5), those who are guided by religion will be animated by a spirit of manly self-reliance. Knowing that God's decrees have been inscribed in their minds, they will look to their own natural capacities in order to find a way to extricate themselves from their present dangers. But while the superstitious, on the other hand, will make sacrifices, those "sacrifices" and the prayers that accompany them will always be of a fundamentally mercenary character—in fact, they would be better described as personal bargains which the desperate try to strike with supernatural powers in order to get something by giving something up in return. Moreover, unlike the religious, who accept the authority of their natural capacities, those who are in the grip of superstition "call human wisdom vain and reason blind" precisely because these things cannot show them the way "to the vain things they long for" (P.1.5). Since the superstitious cannot reconcile themselves to the limitations which nature places on human power, and since they cannot accept the place which chance holds in our affairs or

the misery whose presence is often beyond our control, they necessarily tend to adopt an outlook on life which seeks to discredit the authority of reason and the natural light. Thus, from the seemingly innocuous problem of ordinary human misfortune there arises a more robust challenge to rationalism itself in the form of mystical doctrines which "interpret the whole of nature in amazing" and "insane" ways (P.1.4, 6).

Now, it is to refute such doctrines which despise and condemn the natural light "as the source of impiety" (P.5.1) that Spinoza claims to have written the *Treatise*. Indeed, its first fifteen chapters will be devoted to an examination of Scripture that will attempt to show that there is no conflict between the word of God and the natural light—or in other words, that true "religion," as opposed to "superstition," really is as Spinoza describes it here. But in a very pregnant comment, Spinoza now indicates that in order to demonstrate the falsity of these mystical and anti-rationalist doctrines, all that is required is to show that they really do have their origins in the self-interested and fearful calculations which he has just described. Indeed, he claims that his analysis thus far permits him to make three important claims:

> [1] that only while dread lasts do human beings struggle with superstition; [2] that all the things they have ever worshiped by vain religion *have been nothing but phantasms and the hallucinations of a sad and fearful psyche*; and, finally, [3] that prognosticators have ruled among the plebs to the greatest degree, and have been formidable to their Kings to the greatest degree, in the greatest straits of the imperium (P.1.8, emphasis added).

If it is true, in other words, that human beings only remain superstitious while they are in the grips of dread, it follows that the objects of what Spinoza now speaks of as "vain religion" must be little more than "hallucinations of the imagination" (P.1.5). His psychological account of the origins of superstition, in other words, is also meant to serve

as a hypothesis which, if proved, would show definitively that the gods worshipped by the superstitious are not real and that the anti-rationalist position which they are said to sanction is also demonstrably false. In chapter 1, he will attempt to show that the revelations of the Biblical prophets were also imaginary, and that once the Bible is purged of its superstitious elements, it too can be said to endorse the authority of the natural light. But in the present context at least, it remains the case that Spinoza's hypothesis about the psychological roots of superstition remains just that—aside from an anecdote involving Alexander the Great (P.1.7), he has not actually offered any proof of it. It may therefore be of some importance that Spinoza in the above quotation mentions a third consideration concerning monarchy suggesting that there is an intimate connection between fear, superstition, and autocracy. If political arrangements were altered so as to replace Europe's monarchies with liberal republics that could improve the fortunes of human beings, and if superstition were to decline as a result, could that perhaps prove Spinoza's psychological hypothesis correct?

This suggestion is as yet only preliminary, but it is worth considering whether Spinoza is hinting here that in order to demonstrate its own validity rationalism may need to undertake a project of political reform. At the very least, it must be said that until Spinoza has somehow shown his psychological account of the origins of superstition to be true, his claim that human beings are vulnerable to it "by nature"—rather than by something supernatural—must remain purely hypothetical. Moreover, the same must also be true of his professed denial of what those "others say who deem that it arises in that all *mortals* have some confused idea of the deity" (P.2.1, emphasis added).

Spinoza's account of the psychological origins of superstition, of course, makes no mention of the problem posed by human mortality. In fact, its very premise seems to be that whereas human beings may worry about death when its prospect is immediately before them—as it was for Alexander—when fortune is favorable they are so filled with pride and overconfidence that they think little of it. Thus, because superstition is not the product of a restless discontent with mortality as such, but is rooted instead in an emotional response to more basic kinds of misfortune, it follows that it is as "variable and unsteadfast" as those emotions themselves (P.2.2). This, at any rate, appears to be the fundamental presupposition of the *Treatise*, but it would also seem to be the hypothesis which Spinoza's political science will need to demonstrate. For if Spinoza can show superstition really to be unsteadfast by bringing about its decline, that would be sufficient to refute the view that human beings are naturally troubled by their mortality in a way that instills in them a hope to transcend it. As the body of the *Treatise* will make clear, the need to refute the latter possibility may well be the most important task which Spinoza faces: it is prerequisite not only for carrying out his project of political and religious reform, but also for vindicating the conception of human excellence which his rationalism posits.[89]

Spinoza's preface, however, is not wholly silent about the possibility of immortality. Indeed, the prospect of "salvation" now comes to the fore as Spinoza ceases to mention "superstition" and begins to speak of "religion" instead (P.2.3). The transition

[89] For the philosophic attitude towards the problem of mortality, cf. *Ethics* IV P67, one of Spinoza's most anti-Socratic statements: "*A free man thinks of nothing less than of death, and his wisdom is a meditation on life, not on death*."

from superstition to religion—that is, to the monotheism of the Turks as well as of the practitioners of "true" religion—appears to occur in the following way. Superstition, as Spinoza has just noted, has historically provided a means for "prognosticators" to rule "among the plebs to the greatest degree" (P.1.8). In fact, this practice has led to the common opinion, which Spinoza here puts into the mouth of Quintus Curtius, that there is actually nothing that "*regulates a multitude more effectively*" (P.2.3). And yet, Spinoza's account of the growth and development of politicized superstition should initially lead one to suspect otherwise. For as long as the multitude remain "miserable" (P.2.3), to cultivate superstition for a political purpose is in effect to play with fire. Because those who assure the plebs that they can improve their lot through the aid of supernatural powers are imposters, unless they are extraordinarily fortunate they will soon find themselves in the embarrassing position of being unable to deliver on their promises. The misery of the vulgar consequently ensures that they are as unlikely to persist in any given superstition as they are to accept such beliefs in the first place, and they can therefore be expected to turn on tomorrow those who are manipulating them today. Thus, "this unsteadfastness has been the cause of many tumults and atrocious wars," for the vulgar "are easily induced by a show of religion now to adore their Kings as Gods, and again to execrate and detest them as the common disease of the human race" (P.2.3).

It is precisely at this point in his account, when monarchy and religious violence become prominent themes, that Spinoza ceases to speak of "superstition" or "vain religion" and begins to refer simply to "religion." He now declares that, to avoid the evil

of civil discord, "immense study has been employed to embellish religion, *true or vain*, with worship and pomp so that it might be taken more seriously than any other motive and always be cultivated by everyone with the utmost observance" (P.2.4, emphasis added). Faced with this problem of instability, kings have sought to control the harmful effects of superstition by radicalizing it, or by seeking to give it the greatest possible place in the daily lives of their subjects. This is why the transformation of superstition into religion is also one from polytheism to monotheism: it replaces the natural tolerance of pagan antiquity with a single, all-encompassing theology which can successfully control human behavior by maintaining total control over thought. This solution to the political problem, according to Spinoza, has been cultivated with the greatest success "by the Turks, who consider it an impropriety even to dispute, and occupy each's judgment with so many prejudices that they leave no place in the mind for sound reason or for doubting anything" (P.2.4). But this strategy has also been cultivated by the teachers of "true" religion—i.e. Christianity—as well. Indeed, both Christianity and Islam have proved to be successful allies of monarchy because they persuade people "to fight for their servitude as though for their salvation" (P.3.1). Their teaching about the prospect of another life is sufficient to render the promises of the older kind of prognosticators unpersuasive. In fact, one can go so far as to say that this teaching of theirs is in fact the logical solution to the political problem which the latter first incited. This is why, according to Spinoza, "the spirit of the multitude" in his time is "still vulnerable to the superstition of the Gentiles" (P.3.3). Christianity, in other words, is but the most mature version of the kind of piety with which Quintus Curtius was familiar—and it therefore

seems that he was not altogether wrong in claiming that nothing regulates a multitude more effectively than superstition.

But while theocracy thus presents itself as the best solution to the problem of regime stability, it is not the only one. For "in a free republic," according to Spinoza, "nothing can be attempted more unhappily" than to tell citizens how to think. In this kind of regime citizens are so firmly attached to their intellectual independence that they incite sedition if—but only if—their opinions are criminalized (P.3.1). The possibility of this alternative solution to the political problem is, according to Spinoza, "the chief thing I have set out to demonstrate in this treatise" (P.3.3). The main purpose of his work is to conduct a project of political reform which will culminate in the creation of a liberal-democratic society where everyone "is granted the full freedom to judge, and to worship God on the basis of his own mental cast," and indeed, "where *nothing*"—not piety, not philosophy, not pleasure, and not even life itself—"is considered dearer or sweeter than freedom" (P.3.3, emphasis added). Now, Spinoza identifies this republic with the one in which he lives, but his claim to this effect is dubious to say the least. In a well known letter, he indicated that he wrote the *Treatise* in part because freedom of speech in the Netherlands was "in every way suppressed by the excessive authority and egotism of preachers."[90] In saluting the "rare happiness" of the Dutch Republic, then, Spinoza presents the *Treatise* as a work of patriotism, but he also subtly changes the meaning of what that Republic and that patriotism stand for. He replaces the religious kind of

[90] Epistle 30 (Spinoza 1995, 186). Spinoza also acknowledges this practice of censorship at the end of the preface and at the close of chapter 20 (P.7.1-2; 20.8.1-2). If Hamburg is taken as Spinoza's fatherland

spiritedness that is present in the historical Netherlands with one that defines itself in opposition to the religious prejudices which he now baldly calls "the traces of ancient slavery" (P.3.3).

But while religion may be less important than freedom in the new, liberalized Dutch Republic, insofar as that freedom calls for great sacrifices on the part of citizens, the kind of spiritedness which Spinoza envisions on its behalf cannot be entirely secular. Because he too will need to persuade citizens "to spend blood and soul" (P.3.1) for their country, it appears that Spinoza will need to draw upon at least some aspect of the Turkish solution to the political problem which he just inveighed against. Thus, it is not surprising that he now changes his tone somewhat and claims to speak as someone whose exclusive concern is to free the "ancient religion" of the corruptions imposed on it by modern theologians (P.4.4). Swearing an oath to "immortal God" (P.4.5), he draws upon the kind of anthropocentric way of thinking—the angry sense that the universe must be somehow just and therefore responsive to human needs—which he has just associated with the origin of superstition and which he criticizes throughout the *Treatise*. The purportedly original or authentically Biblical Christianity which Spinoza now defends is said to sanction exactly the kind of individual intellectual independence which is the chief characteristic of his idealized portrait of the Netherlands. In contrast to *all* seventeenth century beliefs—be they Christian, Muslim, Jewish, or Heathen (P.4.1)—which are filled with prejudices that incite hatred and "impede each from using his own free judgment" (P.4.4), "the ancient religion" commands precisely this. Indeed, when

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(since the *Treatise's* original title page claimed that it was published there) this problem is all the more

Spinoza swears the aforementioned oath, he piously and indignantly inveighs against the current predominant view which places religion in "absurd secrets" and which considers those who believe the understanding "by nature corrupt . . to have a divine light." This "is the most inequitable thing" (P.4.5), for true religion, as he implies, commands precisely the opposite view: rather than turning human beings from rational beings "into beasts" (P.4.4), it protects the human dignity that is found in our capacity for independent thinking. Piety and religion, in other words, are on the side of humanity in the fullest sense of that term: they sanction our capacity to live as complete and fulfilled beings without the aid of supernatural or superstitious assistance, and they therefore lead upward to the *summum bonum* as Spinoza will go on to articulate it in this *Treatise*.

Spinoza's central task as he now defines it therefore appears to be quite simple: it is to recover the Bible's authentic support for rationalism which has unfortunately been obscured by the tendency of theologians to impose the "insane," mystical teachings of Greek philosophy onto it (P.4.7-8). Once this task is accomplished, Spinoza's theology will be able to serve as a religious support for a regime which may need to call upon its citizens to make sacrifices for the sake of freedom. But as Spinoza describes it, this new piety, though spirited, is also pacific, and so it would seem that its establishment should also lessen the need for such sacrifices to be carried out. Because the citizens of a liberal republic will only raise seditions when theologians tell them what to think, in a world where the acceptance of "opinion" and the performance of "ministries" are considered to be no part of religion at all, and where the clergy consider "picking at dissidents publicly"

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acute, since censorship was much harsher there than in the Netherlands (Israel 2006, 136).

(P.4.1-3) to be the very essence of impiety, that possibility must remain purely hypothetical. This is why the causes of intellectual freedom, civil peace, and true piety are in fact one and the same. A religious outlook that supports the philosophic conception of human blessedness will also fulfill Christianity's longstanding promise to bring about "love, gladness, peace, continence, and faith toward all" (P.4.1).

According to Spinoza, then, the intellectual independence that characterizes his own way of life is in fact part and parcel with that which is called for in the Bible, and the project of the *Treatise* as a whole will be to demonstrate this. By examining Scripture "in a full and free spirit" (P.5.1) he will also show that Scripture sanctions that spirit. In so doing, Spinoza insists, he will establish the Bible's divinity in a way that the ordinary theologians cannot. For while the latter simply presuppose that it is "everywhere truthful and divine," Spinoza notes that this is the very proposition that has to be established, and he asserts that this is more easily done by having recourse to "what does not need human fantasies"—i.e. to reason (P.4.8). But this claim seems to invite the following consideration. If it can be demonstrated that Scripture truly does endorse a life that is lived in accordance with reason's dictates, that itself would render the Bible redundant—at least for those whose understandings have been cultivated to the greatest degree. And even for the rest, insofar as true piety would be said to consist in a spirit of rational thinking and independence of mind, the Bible would seem to serve only as a starting point. To the extent that it remained an authority for someone, that person could not truly be said to be pious. Thus, the idea that a life of piety is one that consists in the cultivation of intellectual independence and the use of our natural capacities would appear deeply

paradoxical, and these paradoxes are reflected in a series of contradictory statements which Spinoza now makes in his summary of the rest of the work. He claims, for example, that the Biblical prophets taught "true virtue" (P.5.3) and endorsed the conclusions of the natural light (P.5.7), but he also says that they taught only very "simple things" which could incline the multitude towards "devotion" (P.5.7) or obedience toward God "with a full spirit" (P.5.7, 10, 13). Thus, he also claims that precisely because it teaches "nothing besides obedience," revelation is "completely distinct from natural knowledge and *has nothing in common with it*" (P.5.12, emphasis added). If the second of these statements encapsulates Spinoza's serious view of the matter, if reason or philosophy in every case points away from devotion or obedience, then it is tempting to suspect that the rationalistic piety which he will propagate in this work is meant to be self-undermining. His analysis of Scripture, in other words, may point his most careful reader towards a life of reason that is held to be superior to one that is lived in accordance with even the most liberalized Biblical precepts.[91]

[91] That the *Treatise* is directed to at least four different groups of readers, and was written with the certain prospect of religious and political censorship in mind, seems to be evident from the description of his intended audience which Spinoza invokes at the end of the preface (P.6-7). In accordance with Spinoza's own claim that religious education "can and has to vary in accordance with mental cast" (5.1.13), in what follows I will attempt to trace the way in which Spinoza's project of cultural enlightenment sought to achieve a single purpose by communicating different and often contradictory messages to readers whom he believed to have different levels of ability and varying degrees of freedom from "prejudice." That Spinoza wrote esoterically has been most famously argued by Strauss (1952 and 1965, 1-31), although, as Bagley points out in some detail, a long tradition dating back to Spinoza's own time held that he deliberately obscured his meaning in order to conceal his religious opinions (See Bagley 1996; 1999; and 2008, 48 n.54). Other scholars who have come to regard Spinoza as engaging in esotericism or deception of some form or another include Cook (1999), Smith (1997), Verbeek (2003), and Yovel (1989). This view has been criticized most prominently by Donagan (1988, 14-34; 1996), Harris (1978), Garrett (1990), and Rice (1999).

PROPHECY AND RELIGIOUS ANTHROPOLOGY

The task which Spinoza appoints for himself in the *Treatise* is to embark on a fresh reading of the Bible which will take it seriously on its own terms and "admit nothing as its teaching" which is not also "taught by it very clearly" (P.5.1). Thus, as he opens chapter 1, he provides a definition of prophecy which would likely be acceptable to an orthodox believer. "Prophecy, or Revelation," he offers, "is certain knowledge of some matter revealed by God to human beings" (1.1.1). This definition, however, immediately leads to a much less orthodox consequence: it sets up a dichotomy between the prophets themselves, who have this "certain knowledge," and their audiences, who must embrace what they say solely "by mere faith" (1.1.2). Now of course, the need to accept this distinction would likely not be persuasive to an orthodox believer, who as a believer would never claim to know for certain that the object of his belief is real, but only to be one of the 'faithful' (cf. Struass 1965, 28). But as Spinoza almost immediately makes clear, and in great contrast to what he had suggested in the preface, it now appears that he is not writing for such a person. By defining prophecy as certain knowledge, he accomplishes two surprising things: he draws a distinction between the divine messenger and the divine message—which results in the unexpected decision to discuss prophecy and prophets in separate chapters—and he also concludes "that natural knowledge can be called Prophecy" as well (1.2.1).

In fact, Spinoza claims, the natural revelations that come through the use of reason are far more trustworthy than those of revelation in the ordinary sense, for they involve a certainty that "does not yield to prophetic knowledge in any mode" (1.2.3).

Spinoza's evidence for this assertion is found not in the Bible but in an experience which he expects his reader to have undergone, for, "as anyone who has tasted the certainty of the understanding has without a doubt experienced within himself," the process of rational deduction produces an experience of clear and distinct understanding—"not in words but in a far more excellent mode" (1.4.1)—that cannot possibly be controverted. Spinoza, in other words, is writing only for a certain type of religious believer: someone who continues to accept the Bible's authority but who has also undergone the experience of scientific certainty that comes, say, from completing a Euclidean proof—and who furthermore does not suspect that that "inward attestation" (A.2) could have been a grand deception. While continuing to accept the traditional accounts of revelation contained in the Bible, such a person would not expect to have a revelatory experience himself, and he would therefore agree with Spinoza's unproven assertion that "we do not have any Prophets" today (1.5.3).

Spinoza's strategy for convincing such a reader to follow him, which is more rhetorically persuasive than logically compelling, is to drive a wedge between his desire for certain knowledge and his residual trust in the Bible's authority.[92] Since those who read the prophets' words can only embrace what they say by "mere faith" there exists a substantial hearsay problem. How can we know that these "interpreters" actually interpreted God's words to them correctly? In fact, how can we be sure that God was speaking to them at all? It therefore seems to be important that the example which

[92] Spinoza's strategy in the first six chapters has been well summarized by Gildin: "Spinoza seeks to confront his reader with a dilemma by making him choose between an understanding of God which is

Spinoza uses to justify his definition of prophecy, and the very first quotation from the Bible in the entire book, involves not God speaking to Moses but Moses speaking to Pharaoh "in the role of God" (1.1.5). Since every reported instance of traditional revelation involves a human playing this role, so to speak, any reader who prefers to rely on his own "inward attestation" should have good reason to begin to question his acceptance of the Bible's veracity. Indeed, as Spinoza will make clear at the end of the *Treatise*, even many of Moses' contemporaries believed him to be an imposter (17.12.43).[93]

Now, because Spinoza's argument in this chapter appeals to the experience of reason's "inward attestation," it does not take seriously the Bible's claim that the latter is not to be trusted.[94] He claims that the only way to make sense of its claims that are said to exceed the limits of our understanding is "to roll out the sacred scrolls" and carefully examine what the prophets have handed down to us "by mouth or in writing" (1.5.2-3). But of course, anything that was communicable in such a way would by no means exceed the limits of our understanding; the idea that the Bible can only be understood by those who are privileged with mystical insights is not something that Spinoza can refute. In fact, his response to such a claim is to ridicule it: he expressly indicates that he will not take up the objection of someone who "wanted to understand, or rather to dream, that the Prophets had a human body but not a human mind, so that their sensations and

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Biblical but unacceptable and understandings which, while they are not unacceptable in the same way, are unsupported by the authority of the Bible" (Gildin 1980, 163).

[93] See also Yaffe 1997, 139

consciousness were of quite another nature than ours" (1.2.4). Now, in the preface Spinoza had promised that his analysis of the Bible would refute precisely this position, and so it may be tempting to conclude that that was a mere boast. But since this boast would surely undermine the integrity of the entire *Treatise* in a way which the author would doubtless have recognized, it may also be that by mocking this position Spinoza is in fact acknowledging that he cannot refute it in the straightforward manner which we might have expected. Reason, after all, cannot engage much less debunk the claims of those who reject the rule of non-contradiction, and so Spinoza's mockery may be intended to show that if he is to fulfill his original promise he will have to travel another path. Perhaps, as Strauss observes, Spinoza's ridicule of orthodoxy is not meant to replace his refutation but rather "is itself the refutation" (Strauss 1965, 28-9).

Just how this could be is not immediately clear, but Spinoza may be hinting at the character of this alternative refutation when he prefaces his analysis of the Bible in chapter 1 by informing his reader that almost the entire Old Testament is written in the language of "devotion" (1.5.5). Thus, as he writes, its Jewish authors ascribe many things to God improperly because they think and speak in a way characteristic of the vulgar. They never make mention of "intermediate and particular causes" but instead claim that everything that happens to them occurs through God's will (1.5.5). Here, unlike at the opening of the chapter, Spinoza does not even acknowledge the alternative theoretical position which is lurking behind these "vulgar" claims. He does not consider

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[94] Cf., e.g., I Corinthians 3:19-20: "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, *'He catches the wise in their own craftiness'*; and again, *'The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.'*"

the possibility that the universe is governed not by impersonal laws discernable to reason but instead by an unfathomable divine intelligence. But he does make clear that this latter position, which he will not directly engage, is linked to a particular moral attitude which emphasizes "devotion" rather than, say, understanding and self-reliance. The remainder of chapter 1 will therefore be devoted to making the character of that moral attitude clear, and it will attempt to show the members of Spinoza's scientifically-inclined audience that the Bible was written by those in the grip of a mindset which they simply cannot accept.

Spinoza's official teaching in chapter 1 is that all Biblical prophecy, with the important exceptions of that given to Moses and Jesus, was purely a product of the imagination—although he also acknowledges that the prophets thought that what they were imagining was real (1.6.2). He begins his analysis by claiming that the revelation by which the Law was revealed to Moses was real (1.7.1). To do otherwise, as he acknowledges, would "impugn the force of Scripture" (1.9.3)—since both Jews and Christians attach crucial importance to this passage, it would undermine not just the Old Testament but the New Testament as well. But Spinoza's claim that "this voice alone . . . was a true one" (1.7.3) is highly dubious: it rests on the Biblical distinction between the revelation that was given to Moses and that of all other prophets (1.8.2; 1.13.1-2; Dt. 34:10-12), which Spinoza interprets to mean that all non-Mosaic prophecy is false! The other prophets, such as Samuel, received their revelations in dreams, times when, as Spinoza's scientifically inclined reader surely knows, the mind "is most capable of imagining things that are not" (1.8.5). But of course, what the Bible actually says in this

passage (I Sam 3:3-10) is not that Samuel dreamed that God spoke to him but that God spoke to him in a dream. It does not share Spinoza's scientific perspective. Rather—and this is the lesson which Spinoza communicates to his most careful readers—it holds that dreams, and even waking visions for that matter, can communicate divine wisdom and, indeed, commandments which we must follow when deciding how to live our lives.

Since the dreams even of the most sober can often drift into the realm of outright nonsense, Spinoza's analysis is disturbing to say the least. Are we to conclude that the Jewish nation for over five-thousand years followed a way of life that was called for in a Law that somebody literally dreamt up—and that this person furthermore did not know how to distinguish his dreams from reality? As previously indicated, Spinoza's official answer to this question is no, but this turns out to be an extremely backhanded complement. Since the Mosaic revelation did not occur in a dream or a vision, it follows that God must have spoken to the Israelites "*Face to face* . . . that is, as two human beings are used to communicating their concepts to each other, their two bodies mediating" (1.9.4). Since the Jews, in this presentation, were rational and not primitive, it follows that they would not simply take on trust that it was God who was speaking to them. To "be made certain of his Existence," therefore, they wanted actually to *see God* (1.9.10), and this why the Bible frequently describes Him anthropomorphically and in fact "never enjoined us to believe that God is incorporeal or even that he has no image or figure" (1.9.12; 1.13.1-2).

So while the Israelites did not imagine something which they mistook for reality, it seems instead that they saw something real which, while in full possession of their

faculties, they took to be the Deity. Like the Greeks and Romans, they worshipped something corporeal and, presumably, resembling a human being, although Spinoza also acknowledges that at one point they thought that the God who freed them from Egypt was a calf (2.9.22). Now this, of course, is highly unsettling, and so it is perhaps to soften the blow that Spinoza now claims that there is a much more rational brand of piety available to readers of the New Testament. Because, as he noted at the opening of the chapter, God "communicates his essence to our minds with no bodily means employed," it follows that "if a human being were to perceive some things with the mind alone which are not contained in the first foundations of our knowledge and cannot be deduced from them, his mind would necessarily have to be more outstanding and far more excellent than a human one" (1.14.2). This kind of "perfection," Spinoza asserts, was something which was possessed only by "Christ," to whom God revealed the way to salvation not in words or visions "but immediately" (1.14.3). By suddenly invoking Jesus in the middle of this highly debunking chapter on the Old Testament—and by referring to him as "Christ"—Spinoza suggests not only that he is writing as a Christian, and also that authentic Christianity offers a more rational but still genuinely pious alternative to the crude corporealism of the Hebrew Bible. Whereas "Moses spoke with God face to face as a man is used to doing with a friend (that is, with their two bodies mediating), Christ . . . communicated with God *mind to mind*" (1.15.4, emphasis added). And yet, with the possibility of this scientific or quasi-scientific idea of prophecy now established, Spinoza goes further than he has before and, forgetting his earlier statement that to deny the Mosaic revelation is to impugn all of Scripture, claims that "besides Christ, no one"—i.e.

not even Moses—"received what was revealed of God except by the work of the imagination" (1.16.1).

By criticizing the Old Testament in the name of the New Testament, Spinoza not only builds himself a rhetorical safety net, but he also begins to elaborate a new religious outlook which those scientifically inclined readers of his *Treatise* who are shaken by his analysis of the Mosaic revelation can look to in its stead.[95] For these readers, it seems, he will present Christianity as rationalistic, but he also appears to cater to a lingering desire for the supra-rational, or for assistance from an anthropomorphic God, which they may still feel.[96] That Jesus Christ is an anthropomorphic God seems to be implied not only by the fact that he is quite obviously believed to be both a man and a god at the same time,[97] but also because, as Spinoza shortly informs us, God in fact has neither a mind (1.20.13) nor other human moral qualities such as mercy and grace (1.20.20, 23). If Jesus thought he communicated with God "mind to mind," then it appears that his opinions about the divine were little different from those of the Old Testament prophets.

Spinoza's analysis of the Bible thus far can therefore be described as employing a two-pronged approach: while showing to a large audience how the Bible can be read so as to respect reason rather than imagination, he simultaneously demonstrates to his more

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[95] For Spinoza's strategy of indirectly criticizing Christianity by way of Judaism, see Strauss 1952.

[96] Spinoza's attribution to Christ of things which are "above human understanding" (1.14.5), or "which are not contained in the first foundations of our knowledge" (1.14.2) seems to be ambiguous. It may simply mean that Jesus was "the greatest philosopher who ever lived," as Strauss suggests (1952, 172), but it also could imply that he had access to truths that transcend reason. In presenting the New Testament's teaching in this way, Spinoza may be appealing to those readers who fancy themselves rationalistic but who also continue to think that science will lead them to truths which are somehow mysterious or reflective in some way of more traditional religious sentiments. Cf. Donagan (1988, 28ff.), who places great weight on this passage in disagreeing with Strauss.

attentive readers that its genuine teaching expresses little more than the vulgar prejudices of a very primitive people. In both cases, however, Spinoza's case against Scripture is "not theoretical but moral" (Strauss 1965, 29). It seeks to show that the Bible reflects a mindset characterized by devotion and wonder, and it seeks to replace that in turn with a different mindset which looks up to freedom and understanding. Thus, he claims, for example, that the Bible often uses the word *ruach* ("spirit") to refer to human "virtue and capability," and as evidence for this he cites Elihu's claim to Job that "science is not exactly to be sought among the old," for (in Spinoza's interpretation of this passage) "it depends on the specific virtue and capacity of the human being" (1.17.6; Job 32:8). Now, Spinoza here seems to understand "virtue" as something like Machiavellian *virtù,* a vigorous and manly reliance on one's own capabilities that is most often found among the young. Indeed, science as he understands it appears to be an intellectual manifestation of this: it is the zealous and courageous activity of pursuing the truth for oneself through one's own determined efforts. And yet, Elihu also says that it is "the inspiration of the Almighty" which gives men understanding (Job 32:8). Elihu contends that wisdom is not found among the old not because the young have more courage to seek it out, but because it is literally a gift from God—and that gift is not bestowed in return for years of study. Thus, the Bible's true teaching (to which Spinoza only very quietly calls attention), is that we have no capacity to attain knowledge through our own capacities, that those capacities are therefore worthless, and that we are as a result wholly dependent for it on something outside of ourselves. This is the outlook that Spinoza identified in the preface as

[97] This would appear to be what "some Churches state of Christ," and which Spinoza claims not to grasp

conducive to "womanish" dependence, and he also of course linked it there to political servility (P.1.5).

The Old Testament's true teaching on prophecy, it therefore appears, not only entails the complete denigration of human reason, but it also presents that denigration as inseparable from a support for a political teaching which mandates obedience to a law whose precepts cannot be accounted for on rational grounds. Now, it is true that, on the surface of his presentation, Spinoza certainly claims that the Bible endorses natural science. In fact, he asserts that when Solomon used the term "spirit of God" he was referring metaphorically to the human mind (1.17.18), or to his "natural science," which Scripture also refers to as "God's science" (1.18.6). But in the context of the first of these passages, Solomon is actually meditating on the utter insignificance and weakness of the mind. Since the "words of the wise are as goads . . . and much study is a weariness of the flesh," it follows that the purpose of human life is not knowledge but obedience: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecc. 12:11-13). Now, in contrast to this view, Spinoza is currently beginning to use the example of Solomon in order to construct a Biblically based but rationalistic moral teaching, one which purports to vindicate the political and intellectual liberty which Spinoza regards as synonymous with a reliance upon one's natural capacities. It is therefore tempting to suspect that in superimposing this view onto the Bible Spinoza is in fact putting this very teaching into practice. His 'refutation' of Scripture, in other words, would seem to be an example of the kind of Machiavellian project to which he alludes: a concerted effort to

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(1.15.1).

overturn orthodox Christianity and to replace it with a new "effectual truth." He uses the mantle of Biblical authority, and especially the figure of Solomon, whom he later calls "the Philosopher" (1.6.94), to cultivate an admiration for a human type that will henceforth be considered divine precisely on account of its independence of mind and refusal to submit to intellectual authority. And this outlook, in turn, will permit the future adherents of a new kind of piety to look down upon more traditional ideas of revelation (as Spinoza will soon claim Solomon did [2.9.28]) and to regard even the Bible's record of them as the natural products of a primitive psychology.

Thus, at the end of chapter 1, Spinoza very clearly applies the account of the psychological origins of superstition contained in the preface to the Old Testament. Just as he had there claimed that religion and superstition are very different things, he now indicates that it is perfectly in keeping with piety to recognize that the Jews spoke the way they did because they were used to referring to God all those things that surpassed their grasp and of whose "natural causes they were ignorant" (1.18.9; 2.8.13). They thought storms and lightning (1.18.10) to be sent by God, and they called unusual works of nature "miracles" or "works of God" because they thought them "stupendous," and they "admired them in the greatest degree" when they "opened the way toward salvation in extreme perils" (1.19.12-13). Because this fear was mixed with a combination of ignorance and the admiration that frequently accompanies ignorance,[98] he suggests, the Jews looked for guidance in a kind of knowledge whose causes they could not understand

[98] As will become clear throughout this chapter, Spinoza seldom if ever uses the words "admiration" or "wonder" in anything but a pejorative sense. Cf. his mention of "foolish wonder" in the Appendix to *Ethics* I (Spinoza 1994, 29).

and which they considered divine for that very reason (cf. 1.20.5). Spinoza recalls that these things were true not just of the Jews but of the ancient heathens as well (1.18.10; 1.19.2-3), and he therefore encourages his reader to begin to read the Bible anthropologically, as the poetic and literary expression of a typically primitive people, which can be understood "in universal terms" (2.10.10) alongside the sacred texts of other ancient cultures.

To begin to articulate the details of this new scientific analysis of prophecy is the main task of chapter 2. As he opens this chapter, he declares that the creation of such a study is demanded not only by "Philosophy" and by the subject matter, but also by "the time" in which he is writing. The birth of the Enlightenment, it appears, has made the time ripe for a new cultural offensive, and Spinoza indicates that a key part of his version of that project will be to show that it is a terrible error to seek out "wisdom" or "the knowledge of natural and spiritual matters" from the books of the prophets (2.1.5). This is exactly what the creation of a scientific understanding of prophecy will do: by making clear the as yet unknown laws of nature[99] that rendered the prophets "more capable of *these* rather than *those* revelations" (2.5.3, emphasis original), it will sew a salutary popular doubt about the wisdom of guiding one's life by what is contained in the Holy Writ. This is because the presupposition of this science is the teaching of "experience

[99] Although Spinoza insists that it is certain that prophecy has a natural cause, he modestly claims not to know what these particular causes are (1.22.3). Notwithstanding this, however, he seems to suggest that he is aware of at least the necessary groundwork on which any such explanation must be built. He writes that it is not surprising that the prophets "expressed everything spiritual corporeally," for this agrees "with the nature of the imagination" (1.24.1). What he seems to imply is that human beings cannot help but think of supernatural things as anthropomorphic because the imagination is rooted in, and cannot transcend, the experience we have of ourselves (cf. 1.9.9).

and reason" (2.1.4) that only those who are "rustic and without any learning" tend to have prophetic experiences (2.1.3).

Indeed, Spinoza's rhetoric is at its most powerful in this chapter when, through a series of seemingly arbitrary examples, he shows just how far this claim extends. Politely noting that God always "accommodated" His revelations to the opinions and capacities of prophets (2.8.13, 2.9.17, 2.10.1, 2.10.3, 2.10.6), Spinoza catalogues the great ignorance of science, and of the most rudimentary tenets of mathematics and astronomy, that was present even among those whom the Bible considers to be the most outstanding in wisdom and piety.[100] He points out that Joshua believed in a geocentric universe, that Solomon thought the ratio of the circumference to the diameter of a circle to be 3 to 1, and that Adam, Abraham, and Moses all held shockingly primitive and anthropomorphic conceptions of God (2.8.5, 9; 2.9.1-12, 18-19). Now, in cataloguing these things Spinoza presents himself as a defender of Scripture (2.8.2), and he goes so far as to suggest that by exposing them, and by enabling us to read the Bible literally, he is in fact rescuing it from those rationalists who would twist its words to make it seem to say what it clearly does not (2.8.4). But although Spinoza claims that we can and indeed must accept the ignorance of the prophets "in keeping with piety" (2.8.13), this piety seems designed to

[100] This is true especially of Solomon, the epitome of human wisdom according to the Old Testament. Spinoza claims not only that Solomon was grossly ignorant of simple geometry, but he also admits that he was a prophet, which implies that he too lacked the strength of understanding which is needed to rein in the imagination (cf. 2.8.9-11 with 2.1.4; Solomon's status as a prophet is downplayed, but never explicitly denied, at 2.1.2 and 4.4.34). As Spinoza goes on to present Solomon's scientific knowledge as the centerpiece of his new reading of the Bible, this fact should be kept in mind. If anything, Solomon was only the wisest man "of his age" (2.9.28; 4.4.34), which from Spinoza is not an extremely high compliment.

foster a contempt for the Bible which will not stop at what he arbitrarily labels as "merely theoretical matters" (2.7.12).

Now of course, the massive surface teaching of this chapter is that despite their overwhelmingly primitive and ignorant mindset, the Biblical prophets were nevertheless united by their espousal of a common moral teaching. In Spinoza's words, they all had "a spirit inclined solely to the equitable and the good" (2.4.5), and they could therefore be sure that their revelations were true rather than false because they had a 'moral certainty' (2.4.2). Now, this claim is taken at face-value by a number of Spinoza scholars,[101] but it raises certain questions. If, after all, the prophets were so primitive and rustic, and of such disparate temperaments, how likely is it that they all just happened to imagine the same, decent moral teaching?[102] Now, Spinoza also equates this moral teaching with the Mosaic Law (2.4.2; 2.4.7), which he therefore seems to regard as synonymous with a code of ordinary moral decency. One way out of this dilemma might therefore be to suggest, as many interpreters have, that Moses was essentially a great legislator[103]—a statesman of very high stature who laid down a good law against which all subsequent prophets could check the moral content of their revelations. But a problem with this interpretation is that, as previously mentioned, Spinoza goes out of his way in this chapter to discuss how primitive and rustic Moses was. He shows, for example, that Moses believed that God was corporeal and that He had His home in the heavens in the manner

[101] See, e.g. Donagan 1988, 24-5; Hunemann 1999; Mason 147-71. This question is to some extent the same as that of whether reason teaches virtue in the usual sense, to be discussed more explicitly below.
[102] Huenemann (1999) argues that this is a problem which Spinoza never solved, and that he therefore regarded the accounts of revelation contained in the Bible with genuine reverence and love.

of the heathen gods (2.9.12, 16). In fact, Spinoza points out that Moses was not even a monotheist. He believed, actually, that God was only the tribal God of the Jews, and that He had consequently left other nations in the care of other gods or sub-gods (2.9.12). Most importantly, however, Spinoza shows that the revelations which Moses received about the divine law were also "accommodated" to his opinions, for he believed God to have anthropomorphic qualities such as compassion, gentleness, and jealousy (2.9.12, 17).

It would be a mistake, then, to view the Moses whom Spinoza presents in chapter 2 as a wise legislator who simply made good political use out of common superstitions. In fact, Spinoza indicates that his mindset was as vulgar as that of those for whom his law was given. It seems that he believed his own lessons, and as a result those lessons were terribly defective. As Spinoza presents it, the moral teaching of Scripture as a whole exhorts man to "nothing besides obedience alone" (2.9.7), and as his discussion of the Mosaic Law now makes clear, there is nothing farther from reason than obedience. Drawing a contrast between Moses and himself, Spinoza writes that Moses taught the Jews "not as a Philosopher, that they might ultimately be compelled to live well on the basis of the freedom of the spirit, but as a Lawgiver, on the basis of the imperium of the Law" (2.9.23). Philosophy, he thus indicates, has absolutely nothing in common with law. For in the most crucial respect the Law of Moses shared a feature which is in fact fundamental to all human law: it sought to procure obedience strictly through the use of mercenary rewards and punishments, or "to curb the vulgar as a horse by the rein"

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[103] See, e.g. Frankel 2001 and 2002; McShea 98-9. In fairness, it should be noted that Spinoza presents

(2.9.24; 4.2.2). The morality which was thus taught to the Jews therefore had absolutely nothing in common with "virtue and true blessedness" (2.9.26), of which, he says, they were entirely ignorant. On the contrary, Moses taught them "in the same mode in which parents are used to teaching children who lack *all reason*" (2.9.25, emphasis added).

Spinoza's overt intention in this passage is to emphasize the very primitive character of Old Testament morality, but it should not be overlooked that he also implies that *any* morality that teaches obedience is not only childish but also subhuman. Because the rewards and punishments promised by the Mosaic Law blinded human beings to their true good—or rather, since the Israelites were already so blind—it kept them in a state of spiritual slavery (2.9.23-24). In contrast to Locke, who goes out of his way to claim that the idea of divine reward and punishment is not only necessary but demonstrably rational, Spinoza implies that one who is guided by reason will never take his bearings by law. That is why Solomon, who had the most reasonable opinions about God in the Old Testament, and "who surpassed everyone of his age in the natural light," saw through the law's intended purpose and simply violated it. Indeed, he recognized that it existed only to control "those who lacked reason" in part because he was aware that the rewards and punishments which it promised were simply mythic: "He taught that all goods of fortune are vain for mortals . . ., that human beings have nothing more outstanding than the understanding, and that they are punished by no greater punishment than foolishness" (2.9.28). A rational Spinozist, it seems, will recognize that because there is no divine support for justice in the usual sense, all of one's efforts should be directed to the pursuit

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this contrary view at several points later in the book (5.3.5-7; 7.5.13; 17.4.1ff.).

of one's own advantage—but that advantage must only be understood to consist in the cultivation of wisdom. So while there are no categorical imperatives that must be followed—and this is the primary reason why obedience as such is irrational—it is also the case that no material and bodily rewards can serve to justify making sacrifices. Thus, Solomon's one error was that he "did what is not worthy of a Philosopher" and indulged in pleasures (2.9.28). The life of philosophy is not hedonistic.

Now, what is most intriguing about this passage from a political standpoint is that Spinoza has now begun to present Solomon as a model for a new kind of proto-philosophic piety. Not only does he seem to think it not dangerous to advertise the irrationality of law, but he even seems to want to create a popular outlook that can admire and imitate this kind of spiritual independence. This would seem to be what Spinoza is referring to when he raises the enigmatic possibility of compelling human beings "to live well on the basis of the freedom of the spirit"—which is an accurate description of the educational task which would be faced by the parent of a child who did not "lack all reason." For a child who has the natural potential to reach his majority and his liberation, the job of a parent is to make appropriate use of rewards and punishments in a way that will eventually instruct him to do what is good without such sanctions. So too, Spinoza seems to indicate, the kind of education that a philosopher would hand down to society would be one designed to enable at least an elite few—a handful of potential Solomons—to pursue their truest advantage unhampered by a belief in divine reward and punishment. Thus, in the coming chapters, Spinoza will use the examples of Solomon as well as Paul in order to claim that Scripture teaches a "worship and love of God" (2.9.24) which is

rooted not in the corporeal sanctions allegedly emphasized in the Old Testament, but instead in a loftier, more spiritual, and more enlightened kind of self-interest. But although the task of bringing about such a liberation may well also require the weakening of beliefs among a greater number, it also remains the case that philosophy is the province only of a few. Because of this, Spinoza will also have to claim that reason, which teaches the uncompromising pursuit of self-fulfillment through wisdom, also commands ethical living in the ordinary sense. This is why Spinoza contradicts himself so many times in chapter 2, and why in the following chapters he will present several, irreconcilable pictures of where our greatest good and our highest blessedness can be found.

REASON AND THE RELIGION OF REASON

Chapters 3 through 6 are meant to show what Scripture teaches about the choosing of the Hebrews, the Divine Law, and miracles (cf. P.5.6). But by the end of chapter 2 Spinoza already seems to have conveyed his view of about the Bible's understanding of these three subjects. Speaking "in universal terms" (2.10.10), he has shown his intended reader that the Scriptures should be understood as the product of a typically ancient mindset characterized by devotion, admiration, and above all, ignorance—that its authors thought they were "chosen" by God because they believed every nation to have its own deity (2.9.12-16), that they lived by a Law that was appropriate for their child-like condition (2.9.24-5), and that they considered unusual

works of nature miraculous because they wondered at what they could not understand (1.18.9-11). The next few chapters therefore will not be devoted primarily to an additional analysis of what the Bible has to say about these subjects. Instead, they will articulate Spinoza's own philosophic teaching on human psychology, political science, and physics. In each of the next four chapters, Spinoza begins by laying out the insights of his rationalism dogmatically, without justification, and he then proceeds to show how the Bible should be read by someone whose outlook is more enlightened than the one contained in Scripture. But he also identifies this new rationalistic understanding of religion with one that seems at times to dilute that very understanding, and which, in cultivating an admiration for the philosophic life, also obscures what distinguishes it from the kind of existence that was called for by the old piety. To make sense of these contradictions, it will be necessary to pay attention to two elements: Spinoza's quarrel with the Bible's psychology, on the one hand, and his attempt to resolve that quarrel through the spread of an alternative religious teaching, on the other.

Spinoza opens chapter 3 by stating his philosophic thesis, as it were, about his understanding of human psychology and of the ends to which, according to reason at least, men are naturally led. "Each's true happiness and blessedness [*beatitudo*]," he writes, "consists solely in the enjoyment of the good," and that good furthermore "consists *solely* in wisdom and knowledge of the true" (3.1.1-2, emphasis added). Endorsing in his own name the position which he had earlier put in the mouth of Solomon, Spinoza suggests that the objects which men ordinarily covet—such as wealth, honor, and power—are wholly vain. Moreover, they are vain in part because the love of

them inclines men to competition, or to a preoccupation with the affairs of others. One's wealth, for example, can only be measured by comparison, and so too with all the other goods of fortune. By contrast, wisdom would seem to be synonymous with "the tranquility of true life" (3.1.3) precisely because it does not need to be obtained through competition, or after a restless struggle for power. The possession of wisdom leads to what Hobbes derisively termed the "repose of a mind satisfied"[104] because it produces a kind of enjoyment that is wholly self-absorbed, for if a man happens to be wiser than others, that does nothing to "enlarge *his* wisdom—that is, *his* true happiness—in any way at all" (3.1.2, emphasis added). The peak of humanity, so to speak, or the end to which the pursuit of happiness that governs our psychology points, appears to consist in something like the life of contemplative isolation which Spinoza himself famously led. Of course, Spinoza does not discount the possibility that a wise man could benefit from the presence of others like himself. But although wisdom can be shared, it can never be enjoyed in common, and he therefore seems to indicate that the philosopher would consider such benefits solely from the point of view of his own personal utility. Thus, while Spinoza here follows the tradition of ancient and medieval thought in considering human beings as oriented towards the pursuit of a *summum bonum* or a *finis ultimus*, he breaks from that tradition in a significant way by stripping the meaning of those terms of any concern for devotion to others.[105]

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[104] Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* xi.1-2.

[105] Spinoza thus eschews the relativism of Hobbes and Locke while retaining their desire to re-orient human concerns to the pursuit of rationally construed individual self-interest. He follows Aristotle and the scholastic tradition in positing a single end for human life, but he divorces that end from the religious or

Indeed, according to Spinoza, it would appear that this traditional moral understanding is rooted in exactly the kind of envy and resentment—in the kind of short-sighted and confused thinking—which animates the lives of those whose primary concern is with goods other than wisdom. For the Hebrews, as he indicates, were in the grips of precisely this kind of attitude. Thus, when God told them that he had chosen them "in preference to the other nations" and that He was "known to them alone to the neglect of others," He was merely accommodating His message to the mindset of a people whose resentment led it to glory in the misfortune of its neighbors (3.1.4-5). Now, as some commentators have pointed out,[106] Spinoza's characterization of the Hebrews' mindset appears to be grossly unfair. For it fails even to consider the possibility, which the very passages to which he refers here plainly indicate (e.g. Dt. 4:5-8), that the Jews were "chosen" by God to receive special commandments, or to perform duties that went well beyond those called for by ordinary morality, and that these in turn exalted them in the sight of other nations as a positive example of justice and righteousness. Spinoza does not take up the possibility that the Jews were to be "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6), although (having been born and educated as a Jew), it is impossible to conceive that he was unaware of this view. And this neglect, in turn, seems to leave Spinoza almost unable to explain why Solomon—the Bible's epitome of wisdom, and a man whom he has just presented as liberated from ordinary moral concerns—asked God,

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moral virtues which call for self-abnegation or self-sacrifice. Thus, he has been famously characterized as "the last of the mediaevals" and "the first of the moderns" (Wolfson 1958, vii).

[106] See, e.g., Smith 1997, 99.

out of apparent resentment, not just for wisdom, but also to ensure "that no one in the future will be as wise as he" (3.1.5; I Ki. 3:12).

Now, the Biblically alert reader will note that when God makes this promise to Solomon, He does it not as a concession to envy or as "a mode of speaking" (3.1.5) but as a reward for Solomon's magnanimity and selflessness. Given the opportunity by God to ask for anything that he desires, Solomon requests not riches or long life but knowledge of justice so that he can be a good king—and so pleased is God with this unselfish request that He rewards him with the wisdom for which he asked along with those other goods for which he did not (I Ki. 3:9-14). Not only are Solomon's motivations sharply different from those which Spinoza claims should animate the most clear-sighted human beings, but it would also seem possible to draw a sharp contrast between the wisdom of Solomon and the wisdom of Spinoza. For Solomon's wisdom, as it becomes apparent through his first act of judgment, teaches him and us that the true mother of a baby must be she who would rather see it raised by another than cut in two (I Ki. 3:16-28). Or rather, to extrapolate from this story, it teaches that human beings are not solitary and selfish by nature but instead conscious of their duties to others. The Bible teaches that our desire for happiness is inextricably bound up with a pull of obligation which we feel to entities greater than ourselves—to family, to friends, and to God—and it is very possible to conceive that someone who agrees with Spinoza about the primitive and unscientific character of the Old Testament may yet continue to feel the tug of this kind of devotion. Spinoza's true critique of the Bible, in other words, must be moral and psychological rather than scientific. It will have to demonstrate that this devotional

understanding of human nature is not natural but historical, and one way to do this would be to show that, at least among the most clear-sighted, such longings can be made to disappear.

This, at any rate, appears to be one way of explaining why Spinoza's main concern in these chapters seems to be to create a philosophic religion which will admire the self-absorbed independence of the rational life. The centerpiece of that religion is a new conception of human *beatitudo*, or of the *summum bonum*, which, as we have seen, consists "solely in wisdom and knowledge of the true" (3.1.2). As Spinoza had indicated at the opening of chapter 1, philosophy can be said to be identical with piety because nature's "universal laws," which "always involve eternal truth and necessity," are "nothing but God's eternal decrees" (3.3.2). Thus, because human beings are "part of nature as well," or, to say the same thing, subject to God's decrees, they have been determined—or chosen by God—to do what they can do to preserve their being (3.3.4-5). Indeed, because "no one does anything except on the basis of the predetermined order of nature" (3.3.6), it is "absolutely" to be granted that "everything is determined" (4.1.5), although this same determinism also makes it "necessary" for human beings, in the ordinary course of their lives, to fail to see this and instead "to consider things as open possibilities" (4.1.8). According to Spinoza, in other words, human beings inhabit a universe in which God's presence is all-encompassing, and in which everything that appears to them to be a result either of fortune or of human choice is in reality the end-product of a chain of causation that stretches back to eternity. We can be said to receive "God's external help" when that causal nexus works out so that something outside

ourselves helps to keep us alive, and we can be said to receive "God's internal help" (3.2.5) when we preserve ourselves through our own efforts, but in reality these are but two ways of perceiving a single thing. Just as human nature is actually just "nature itself insofar as we conceive it as being determined through human power" (4.1.6)—that is, just as our minds are governed by laws of nature, but seem to us to be free—so too the causes of things are really but two ways of conceiving of a unified reality: the single all-encompassing and eternal chain of causes which Spinoza terms "God."

Stripped of its religious coloring, Spinoza's picture of man's place in the cosmos would seem to amount to this: we are a part of a universe in which we enjoy no special status, in which we accordingly do not possess the freedom of the will that is prerequisite for virtue in the traditional sense, and in which, far from being able to engage in great acts of self-abnegation, we are therefore in fact bound (like all the other natural beings) by the laws of nature to preserve ourselves and to seek our own advantage to the extent that we are able. But since "the better part of ourselves is the understanding," our capacity to preserve ourselves as human beings, which is to say, as thinking beings, requires that "if we really want to seek what is useful for ourselves, we have to endeavor above all to perfect our understanding as much as can be done. For our highest good [*summum bonum*] has to consist in its perfection" (4.3.1). This, Spinoza says, is the "aim of all human actions" (4.3.5); the same determinism that governs us also orients us towards thinking. Although not all are clear-sighted about this, everything that we do can be understood as arising ultimately from the desire to understand "things through their first causes" (3.4.1)—which of course entails a recognition that the universe is no more

than a nexus of causation, that there is no cosmic support for human dignity, and that freedom of the will is but a necessary illusion. Thus, Spinoza's paradoxical conclusion about human law applies also to the laws of nature: one who recognizes the necessity of the laws "acts in a steadfast spirit and on the basis of his own decree," whereas one who does not is held "as a horse by the rein," for his lack of mental clarity about why he is doing what he is doing consigns him to a state of sub-humanity (4.2.2). Those who act because they think they are free and those who do so because they know they are not may do the same things, but it is the mental clarity of the latter that makes all the difference. The flourishing of human dignity requires becoming resigned to the lack of support for such a thing in an indifferent universe, and true freedom of the spirit is founded on an intellectual liberation which allows one to recognize that there is no such thing as freedom in the ordinary sense.

Spinoza's conception of the *summum bonum* therefore appears to be deeply paradoxical. Can he really intend for this kind of philosophic resignation to serve as an object of aspiration even for relatively elite religious thinking? These problems, indeed, appear all the more puzzling once we consider that Spinoza actually seems to present at least two descriptions of human perfection. When he first begins to describe the character of our highest good, he claims that it "has to consist" in the perfection of our understanding, but he also suggests that that perfection can come about only if we "seek [*quaerere*]" and "endeavor [*conari*]" to cultivate our intellects "as much as can be done" (4.3.1). Philosophy as Spinoza first presents it thus appears to be a quest for truth rather than a delight in its presence. It is not an activity but an entire way of life, a life which

contains no element of selfless devotion but which is instead wholly dedicated to the clear-sighted pursuit of happiness, or to maximizing that which makes us human and not bestial. On the other hand, however, it is also informed by a recognition that the amount of that happiness which can be achieved is limited by the bounds of the possible, not least because in a universe in which human beings enjoy no special status they cannot attain the kind of contemplative perfection hoped for by sub-philosophic believers in teleology. Moreover, these doubts about just how much we can know seem to become more radicalized as Spinoza begins to speak in a way that appears designed to deny them. For even as he speaks approvingly of the "certainty that really removes all doubt," he indicates that this "depends solely on knowledge of God—both since without God nothing can be or be conceived, and since we can doubt all things so long as we have no clear and distinct idea of God" (4.3.2). All the insights of Spinoza's rationalism, in other words, are founded on the assumption, which is at present no more than an assumption, that "God" as Spinoza describes Him (and not as the Bible describes Him) exists. Thus, it is also true that "our highest good and perfection depends solely on knowledge of God" (4.3.2), for the very idea that our perfection consists in the pursuit of knowledge assumes that the pursuit of knowledge is possible—i.e. that the universe is not mysterious but ordered in such a way that permits us to understand things "through their first causes" (3.4.1).

At least according to Spinoza's initial description, however, it is in no way clear that we actually have such knowledge. Indeed, in chapter 6 he will acknowledge that "God's existence is not self-evident." Rather, as he claims, it "necessarily has to be

concluded on the basis of notions whose truth is so firm and unshakeable that no power can be given or conceived by which they can be changed." Spinoza's entire way of life, and all his theoretical conclusions, are therefore dependent upon proving the existence of his God—which is to say, the existence of unchangeable natural necessities—"beyond a shadow of a doubt." For if there were even a remote possibility that the natural order could "be changed by some power," we might be able to doubt God's existence, and we then would "*never be able to be certain of anything*" (6.1.21, emphasis added). The viability of the s*ummum bonum* as Spinoza has defined it thus depends upon a vindication of the scientific understanding, but, as previously noted, that vindication cannot be provided by an appeal to scientific principles. Thus, when Spinoza claims that we can come to know the property of a cause by inferring it through its effects, and thus that "the more we know natural things, the more perfectly we know God's essence (which is the cause of all natural things)" (4.2.3), he seems to be covering over, rather than resolving, this fundamental problem. For the inference of a cause from an effect is adequate only insofar as it is assumed that the rules of causation hold;[107] it can tell us how the laws of nature function, or what their essence would be like if they happen to exist, but it cannot assure us that they do.

Since Spinoza indicates his awareness of this difficulty, and since his entire conception of human blessedness is at stake in it, it would appear that the repeated professions which he now makes about the certainty of the understanding should be taken as at best provisional. Philosophy to Spinoza, in other words, would seem to consist not

[107] Cf. *Emendation of the Intellect* (Spinoza 1985, 13-14).

primarily in the understanding of causes, or in the kind of geometric reasoning that is present in the *Ethics*, but in the confrontation with the possibility of revelation, or with skepticism as to the possibility of human knowledge, to which the *Treatise* is devoted. That Spinoza presents the conclusions of reason dogmatically in chapters 3 through 6 may therefore be a signal that he cannot do so in any other way, for any arguments which he might have presented in their favor would rest at bottom on premises which would have to be simply taken for granted. But it is also possible that Spinoza's characteristic dogmatism—and he is certainly not the most modest sounding of philosophers—is meant to help rectify that deep uncertainty which he only very quietly acknowledges. If the *Treatise's* theoretical project is connected to its propagandistic project, then it would be beneficial for Spinoza to speak, as he now does, in a tone that is not merely dogmatic but, indeed, religious. Thus, contradicting the indications which he just provided that the cause of the whole could be mysterious, he now claims that nothing "can be or be conceived without God" and, inserting teleological language, he declares that "it is certain that everything in nature involves and expresses the concept of God in proportion to its essence and its perfection" (4.2.3). Since God is identical to the laws by which everything comes to be and is determined, it follows that His 'concept,' or an intellectual manifestation of Him, pervades everything in the universe. Thus, not only is it the case that human knowledge is possible, for "the more we know natural things, the greater and more perfect is the knowledge of God which we acquire" (4.2.3), but Spinoza also suggests that the achievement of our highest good somehow infuses us with the divine

essence, for it puts us in touch with "God himself insofar as he exists in our mind" (4.3.5).

This second portrait of man's "highest blessedness" (4.3.3), then, provides a fuller elaboration of the pantheistic doctrine that was hinted at in the *Treatise's* epigraph, and it also prefigures the picture of the world which Spinoza will go on to present in the *Ethics*—a world which is synonymous with God, and which is therefore pervaded with divinity. By suggesting that everything is somehow "in God," and that God is also simultaneously in each of us, Spinoza appears to draw upon precisely those devotional and mystical ways of thinking which he is elsewhere at pains to debunk. Indeed, he asserts that a human being can become "more perfect in proportion to the nature and perfection of the thing that he loves," and although he first speaks of the love of "the intellectual knowledge of God"—i.e. the love which a scientist may have for his knowledge of the laws of nature—he soon confounds this simply with the "love of God" (4.2.4)—i.e. with a love of the laws of nature themselves, which is not something that a clear-sighted scientist should necessarily feel. In other words, he seems to be drawing upon residual religious sentiments which may exist among educated believers who, while scientifically inclined, are still attached to a view of God that resembles the one contained in the Bible. While such a God may be more impersonal, and certainly less anthropomorphic, than the God whom Spinoza disparaged in chapters 1 and 2, He is still a deity who can serve as an object of love, and who can also endow the universe with a kind of mystical reality (or perhaps with an all encompassing mind) which those chapters also showed to be contrary to the teachings of reason.

By presenting philosophy as divine, Spinoza thus quite explicitly caters to the experience of devotion which he elsewhere disparages, but he also places it in the service of something thoroughly non-devotional. His religious project, in other words, attempts to cultivate an admiration for the pursuit of knowledge understood as the individual's greatest happiness, and it therefore also seeks to encourage those who take their religious duty to think most seriously, and who have the capacity to cultivate their understandings to the greatest extent, to recognize that they are naturally driven solely to pursue their own greatest good. To accomplish this, Spinoza puts forward a new reading of the Bible which effectively purges it not only of its devotional elements, but also, at least at first, of its teaching about the prospect of another life. He claims that the polity of the Hebrews had no higher purpose than physical security "and the rest of the advantages of this life," for "the aim of society as such" is nothing more than this (3.5.4-5). For the same reason, God's covenant with Abraham could entail nothing spiritual: all he wanted was a child, for, as he supposed, besides children "there was nothing that could be of any importance to look forward to . . . in advanced old age" (A.4). But while Spinoza thus insists that the Hebrews' polity was concerned solely with meeting their most basic human needs, he also juxtaposes this allegedly crude carnality and narrow parochialism to the respect for "understanding and virtue" (3.5.13)—that is, for what is truly universal—which he purports to discover in the Psalms, the later prophets, and the New Testament (3.5.13-16, 25, 44-5). To this end, he claims that the Psalmist's mention of the human heart should be taken to refer to the understanding (3.5.15; Ps. 33:15), and he thus seems to intend to replace the experience of loving devotion toward God with one of self-absorbed

cognition. But even as he insists that the later prophets preached "true virtue alone," he also removes the messianic part of their message. He insists that their predictions that the Temple would be rebuilt and the ceremonial law restored should be understood historically, as a reference to "the time of Cyrus" (3.5.61). Since, as he writes, the understanding depends "on our power alone, or on the laws of human nature alone" (3.4.2), the religious admiration for it which Spinoza is seeking to cultivate neither looks down on the human condition as something depraved nor looks forward to transcending it in some way. It aspires neither to self-sacrifice nor to immortality, but to the success of the human intellect unfettered by subservience to any power greater than itself.

Now, that orthodox Christianity does contain a teaching of both immortality and self-sacrifice, and that it furthermore considers these to be inextricably linked, becomes evident when Spinoza reminds the reader that what he has said so far is contradicted by the New Testament: for even if only "security of life" was promised in return for obedience to the Mosaic Law, that "observing the commandments of the Old Testament is not enough for eternal life is obvious from Mk. 10:21" (A.5). As Jesus makes clear in that passage, what is needed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven is not merely to follow the words of the Decalogue but to "sell whatsoever thou hast, and give to the poor." So even if it is true, as Spinoza suggests, that Old Testament Judaism can be dismissed for its parochialism, Christianity would appear to present the prospect of a richer, more universalistic, and yet still devotional and otherworldly kind of piety. To meet this challenge, Spinoza's strategy is not to disparage Christianity but to co-opt it: presenting the Apostle Paul as a kind of philosophic hero, he reads into the New Testament a picture

of human excellence which is founded on a sober acceptance of scientific determinism. Thus, he claims that because Moses was mistaken to imagine God as a "ruler, lawgiver, king, compassionate, just, etc." (4.4.34), it follows that the Decalogue no longer has to be taken seriously (4.4.21). But Paul, on the other hand, recognized "that God's anger and his mercy do not depend on human works," and that is why "he teaches that no one becomes just by the works of the law, but solely by faith (see Rom. 3:28), *by which he surely understands nothing other than the complete consent of the spirit*," or the perception of "God's laws as eternal truths" (4.4.30, emphasis added).

By thus presenting Paul as a Biblical precursor of himself, Spinoza is able to present himself as a Christian and to portray authentic Christianity—the "ancient religion" mentioned in the preface—as identical to the religion of reason which he began to describe at the beginning of chapter 4.[108] Spinoza's scientific determinism, after all, has at least a superficial similarity to Paul's teaching on predestination, and this apparent common ground between the two authors may enable Spinoza's less careful readers to overlook the way in which he changes Paul's original message. Now, as the above quotation makes clear, Spinoza, unlike Locke, does not seek to overlook Paul's doctrine of justification by faith and to replace it with a teaching about works. But whereas Paul in the passages to which Spinoza refers makes clear that when he speaks of faith he is referring to the need for the spirit to consent to something supra-rational, Spinoza equates

[108] Spinoza frequently reminds the reader that Paul often accommodated himself to the grasp and accepted opinions of his audience—"he was a Greek with the Greeks and a Jew with the Jews" (3.5.50; I Cor. 9:20). Strauss thus suggests that in using Paul's authority in order to teach a very un-Pauline message, Spinoza is employing this same strategy—he is "a Christian with the Christians" (Strauss 1952, 190). This interpretation appears to be borne out both by the substantial differences between the two thinkers to be discussed presently, and by the hint about his own use of sacred texts which Spinoza provides at 4.4.8.

faith simply with the understanding. Thus, while Paul claims that human reason is untrustworthy because it has been corrupted by original sin, Spinoza denies the latter's existence (cf. 3.5.46 with Rom. 3:9-11, 4:15-6), and he asserts that Paul's statement that God's virtue and divinity "*are conspicuous in his creatures through the understanding, so that they are without escape*" (4.4.46; Rom. 1:20) should be taken to refer to "the natural light"—for human beings could certainly be excused for failing to follow the commands "of a light above the natural one" (4.4.47). In short, what Spinoza finds in Paul is a nothing short of a theological sanction for his own philosophic view that human blessedness can be found in "complete consent of the spirit"—the paradoxical recognition that there is no free will, and that what the Bible calls sin is unavoidable and consequently unpunishable (4.4.48-9).[109]

Now this, of course, is exactly the view that Locke denounces in the opening lines of *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, and so it would seem reasonable to infer, as we did in the last chapter, that Locke had in mind Spinoza, or those who were propagating more popularized versions of his thought, when he claimed in the *Second Vindication* to have directed his analysis of the Gospels against the Deists. But although Locke thus seems to have criticized Spinoza for spreading a way of thinking which threatens to undermine social bonds, Spinoza could likely respond that Locke's interpretation of the New Testament gave insufficient religious sanction to his own way of life. By usurping

[109] Spinoza claims that when Paul denounces human vice at the end of Romans 1 he is agreeing with Solomon that the punishment of fools is foolishness (4.4.48; Prov. 16:22). In context, however, Paul states that God, angry at the sins of human beings, "gave them up unto vile affections" and to the "lusts of their own hearts," for which He also will punish them in turn (Rom. 1:24, 26, 32). Spinoza may therefore be quietly intending to show the irrationality of Paul's understanding of God, along with that of all retributive punishment.

Paul as a philosophic hero, and by retaining the emphasis on faith which Locke tries to read out of the Epistles, Spinoza seeks to endow his liberal theology with the same spiritual purpose that he hopes will characterize the democratic regime he is attempting to construct. In other words, if Locke's reasonable Christianity is designed for "the illiterate bulk of mankind," Spinoza's, at least at this stage, can be said to be designed for a philosophic or proto-philosophic elite. He revises Paul's statements about faith so as not just to permit philosophy, as Locke does, but also so as to demand it.

But even so, this response does not put away every misgiving, and it seems to be in anticipation of this potential Lockean objection that Spinoza eventually dilutes his picture of the self-absorbed character of what he calls the Divine Law. As early as chapter 3, Spinoza had claimed that Scripture commends "true virtue" (3.5.20, 47, 59, 61, 69), but he had left the content of this virtue ambiguous. He had asserted that reason's universal authority sanctions the following universal law: "to revere God and to abstain from evil works, *or* to act well" (3.5.17, emphasis added). By thus blurring the cultivation of the understanding with what at the opening of chapter 3 he had enigmatically called "acquiring the habit of virtue" (3.4.1), Spinoza seemed to suggest that "true virtue" is most fully present in those who follow a universal law of reason which mandates a certain code of ethical living. And while chapter 3 had left the specific content of that law ambiguous,[110] as Spinoza opens chapter 5 he cites the authority of Isaiah to show that it demands not only the "purification of the spirit"—presumably

[110] That even the self-absorbed conception of the divine law from chapter 4 is not wholly rational is apparent from the fact that Spinoza finds it necessary there briefly to re-endow God with anthropomorphic qualities such as will and understanding (4.4.14-17; cf. also his comments about Christ at 4.4.24-30).

through rational thinking—but also "bringing help to the poor" (5.1.6). So while Spinoza does compromise the self-absorbed character of the ethic that he laid out in the previous chapter, he also appears to suggest that a spiritually self-interested outlook, if it is interpreted in a certain peculiar way, can encourage human beings to lend one another mutual assistance. Thus, he claims that "Christ promised a spiritual reward" for those who followed his instruction not to commit adultery (5.1.14), and he again relies on Isaiah in order to claim that the Bible commends "freedom and charity towards *oneself* and one's neighbor" (5.1.16, emphasis added). In return for "freedom and charity," he writes, we are promised "a sound mind in a sound body and God's glory even after death" (5.1.18). Thus, the Psalms also assert that that human beings who follow a divine set of "moral lessons" will be rewarded with "blessedness and tranquility of spirit" (5.1.19), and Jeremiah similarly taught a "natural law by which all mortals are bound"—a law which is founded on the recognition that God "*exercises compassion, judgment and justice in the world*" (5.1.21), and which is furthermore complemented by the New Testament's promise of "a heavenly kingdom" (5.1.22).

In providing this new interpretation of Scripture, Spinoza seems to be attempting to preserve the spirit of the divine law of chapter 4, but to insist that its teaching about the primacy of individual self-interest and fulfillment through rational thinking can be made amenable with the duty, which was notably absent from that discussion, to care for one's neighbor.[111] The ethical outlook he is trying to craft, in other words, will look upon

[111] Spinoza's claim in chapter 4 that the "sum of the divine law" is "to love God as the highest good" (4.1.2) obviously invites comparison with Jesus' version of it, which includes love of one's neighbor. Cf. Mt. 22:38-40.

morality in a self-interested (but by no means crudely mercenary or hedonistic) way. In these passages Spinoza does not mention devotion alongside charity, and he thus appears to indicate that those who accept the outlook he is promoting will perform acts of charity not out of a sense of duty, but instead because they will regard doing so as the way to fulfill *themselves* as rational beings. But as the above quotations should hopefully make clear, the blurring of charity towards oneself and one's neighbor that Spinoza is promoting would also seem to necessitate re-endowing God with more explicitly anthropomorphic qualities, and also rediscovering in the Bible a vague concept of an afterlife. And yet, whether or to what extent such beliefs are necessary for any given society would seem to be an open question, for Spinoza also notes that the belief in divine reward and punishment "can and has to vary in accordance with the mental cast of each nation, as experience sufficiently teaches" (5.1.13). There may in fact exist the possibility of a kind of educational progress in accordance with which societies can become more or less liberated from such beliefs, and this task will need to be managed by future philosophers, as well as by educators, intellectuals, and members of the liberal clergy, who will inherit the Enlightenment project after Spinoza.

In the latter part chapter 5, therefore, Spinoza appears to hint at a project of potentially radical political and religious reform. For the first time in the body of the *Treatise*, he undertakes a thematic discussion of the nature and origins of political life, and he indicates, as he did at the opening of chapter 3, that the key problem faced by any legislator will always be the incredible perseverance in human beings of envy and resentment. If humans "were constituted by nature as to long for [*cuperent*] nothing

except what true reason indicates," he claims, society would need no laws, but unfortunately "human nature is constituted quite otherwise" (5.2.6-7). "All do seek what is useful to them, yet hardly on the basis of the dictate of sound reason" (5.2.7). According to Spinoza, in other words, it is a steadfast rule of human psychology that we will always pursue our own advantage, but the problem is that the character of that advantage is frequently defined in a complicated way, for our conception of what constitutes our greatest self-interest is filtered most of the time through a prism of irrational emotion. And this, in turn, can engender spirited longings that, to the untrained observer, could be mistaken for acts of willful self-sacrifice. Thus, Spinoza claims that human beings will often long to bring harm to someone who is ruling over them "even though it comes with great evil to themselves as well" (5.2.9), and they can "least of all abide serving their equals and being regulated by them" (5.2.10). All in all, humans by nature would seem to have a kind of democratic pride which, however, can quite easily turn into resentment—the same resentment which Spinoza highlighted in chapter 3 as the source of the Hebrews' apparent devotion. And just as that envy there came to sight as a confusion arising from a failure to discern the true satisfaction that can be found in the life of understanding, so too does the desire for spiritual independence which Spinoza discusses here seem to be a less self-conscious version of the spiritual and intellectual independence sought by the philosopher.

Now, to come to an understanding of what Spinoza is trying to suggest here, it will be helpful to digress briefly and look at the only comments he makes in the *Treatise* about the authoritative source of Christian ethics: the Sermon on the Mount. He claims

that "when Christ says, *Blessèd are the mourners, since they will receive consolation*," his meaning can only be understood in reference to his subsequent teaching "that we not be worried about anything except God's kingdom alone and its justice, which is commended as the highest good [*summum bonum*]" (7.5.8; Mt. 5:4, 6:33). Since Jesus equated justice with the kingdom of God, or with the immortality which he promised to those who followed him, we can therefore conclude that by "mourners" he was referring to "only those who mourn for the kingdom of God and the justice neglected by human beings. For only those can mourn for it who do not love anything except the divine kingdom, *or equity*, and plainly despise the rest of fortune" (7.5.8, emphasis added). What Spinoza therefore seems to imply is that Jesus' teaching about an afterlife has to be understood as arising from a deep-seated but still self-regarding sense of justice—a sense of justice which, while by no means crudely mercenary, still limits itself to a concern for how affairs are organized in this world. Human beings as he presents them look to the law not just for the protection of their lives and worldly possessions, but also to secure the personal dignity that is also present wherever freedom and the enjoyment of these mundane goods are guaranteed. Thus, when human beings live in "a good republic" where the law is enforced and it is known that crime does not pay, they will take great pride in themselves and in their country. To be "held just" by their fellow citizens—that is, to fulfill themselves by acquiring honor and a good reputation (cf. 5.2.5)—they will seek to requite injuries "before a judge . . . not on account of vengeance . . . but in the spirit of defending justice and the laws of the Fatherland, and for it not to be expedient for evil men to be evil" (7.5.13).

Unfortunately, according to Spinoza, Jesus lived not in that kind of regime but "in a corrupt republic," and so Christianity's moral teaching cannot be understood unless it is recognized that it was originally directed to "oppressed human beings" (7.5.12). Because there was no hope of justice in this world for those living under the tyranny of the Caesars, Christ's audience was naturally attracted to the prospect of another. Moreover, Spinoza also says that this applies to his injunction to turn the other cheek "and what follows further" (7.5.9). "What follows further" are the following commandments: if someone should seek to take away your coat, give your cloak as well, love your enemies and "do good to them that hate you," and, in short "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Mt. 5:40, 44, 48). In other words, Jesus teaches that human perfection, like divine perfection, consists in total selflessness, or in complete devotional love, and he also insists that it is only by engaging in such acts of self-abnegation that one can attain immortality. But Spinoza, on the contrary, claims that this kind of moral outlook arose only because, in the particular historical context in which Jesus lived, tyranny had nearly deadened the desire for pride and human dignity which all men feel. In the absence not only of freedom, but also of the robust sense of independence and spiritual self-expression which it allows, the ancient Jews apparently thought that if they gave up on this world, if they gave their rulers all that they asked for and more, then they would be rewarded in a life after this one. It therefore follows that in a better regime, such as the one Spinoza is seeking to establish, hopes for immortality will be significantly muted, and morality, though still spirited and even animated by a sense of duty, will be fundamentally self-regarding.

The central task of Spinoza's political science, it therefore seems, will be to lay the moral foundations for a regime which can successfully manage the problem posed by human pride by providing a healthy outlet for it. In fact, he claims that there actually exist just two possible options: "either the whole society has to hold the imperium collectively, if it can be done, so that all are bound to themselves and no one is bound to serve his equal; or, if a few or one alone holds the imperium, he has to have something above the common human nature, or at least endeavor with the utmost strength to persuade the vulgar of it" (5.2.12). What Spinoza suggests, in short, is that every political regime that has ever existed, or will ever exist, must be either a theocracy or a liberal-democracy. And if a legislator chooses the first option, his pious fraud will have to succeed to such an extent as to eradicate entirely the capacity of those under his command to think for themselves (5.2.15). But if this cannot be completed with the utmost success—as it has been by the Turks (P.2.4)—then he will face a dangerous prospect, for human beings cannot stand being told what to think or what to do by those whom they know to be no greater than they are. In the absence of legitimate hierarchy, they will see only compulsion, and "human nature does not abide being simply compelled." Rather, "as Seneca the Tragedian says, no one holds a repressive imperium together for long" (5.2.8; *Troads* 258-9).

By thus quoting Agamemnon's angry words from the *Troads*, a play about human sacrifice, Spinoza indicates not just that humans face a choice between theocracy and liberal-democracy, but also that the latter possibility should be understood as explicitly anti-theological in character. As long as men retain some shred of their humanity, that is,

as long as they retain the ability to think independently, they will struggle against religious cruelty and against the desire of priests to take this capacity away from them. The most natural form of government for human or thinking beings, then, is a kind of republic which institutes what can be seen as a political analogue of the freedom of the spirit which philosophers possess. It is a republic in which humans, closely reflecting the mandates of the divine law (cf.4.4.33), are motivated not by the fear of some evil but by "the hope of some good that they long for very much" (5.2.13). Most importantly, however, it is a society in which "obedience has no place," for whatever laws citizens make will be sanctioned "on the basis of their own consent" (5.2.14). In "this mode each will long to do his duty" (5.2.13) because each will understand that duty as part and parcel with his own rational advantage.

On the other hand, according to Spinoza, the Bible's political teaching would appear to represent the fullest possible manifestation of the theocratic alternative. For if liberal-democracy is a regime in which "obedience has no place," the Mosaic polity was one in which it was omnipresent. In one of the more comic sections of the *Treatise*, Spinoza claims that not just the ceremonial law, but indeed "the whole law of Moses" (5.3.9), had no purpose other than ensuring that the Jews could "do nothing at their discretion" (5.3.8). He notes that the Hebrews were not only "not permitted to plow, sow, and reap at their discretion," but they could not "eat, drink, shave," or even "rejoice" except "in accordance with the biddings and commands prescribed in the laws." In this passage, he presents the Hebrew polity as frankly Orwellian, and he points out that the Jews were required "to have certain signs on doorposts and hands and between the eyes,

which admonished them to obedience always" (5.3.8). In short, the goal of the ceremonial law was to ensure that the Hebrews could "do nothing at all on the basis of their own decree, but everything on the basis of another's command, and to confess by continual actions and meditations that they were nothing in their own right but were altogether part of another's" (5.3.9).

Indeed, Spinoza goes even further than this, for he insists that this same analysis of the Old Testament ceremonies also applies to those of the Christians, such as "Baptism, the Lord's Supper, festivals," and even "outward prayers." Even though these "still are and always have been common to *the whole of Christianity*," Spinoza insists that they have no spiritual value but were instituted by the civil power in order to procure obedience (5.3.10, emphasis added). He hedges as to whether these were actually instituted by Christ, but he remarkably insists that the entirety of seventeenth century Christianity is actually fundamentally un-Christian—and he thus implicitly suggests that all of medieval European history can be understood more or less as a series of attempts to enslave human beings spiritually by subjecting them to religious mind control. Then, using a seemingly random example, he raises an alternative possibility, which seems to foreshadow where he is going in the *Treatise*. In "the kingdom of the Japanese," he writes, "the Christian religion is forbidden and the Dutch who dwell there are bound to abstain from all outward worship on the basis of a command of the East India Company" (5.3.11). In the religious consciousness which Spinoza imagines for the future, commerce will domesticate religion, ensuring that its demands are seen as purely spiritual and internal, satisfied fully in the activity of thinking for oneself, and not demanding in

the least imposing dogmas on one's neighbor—on missionizing to non-Christian peoples like the Japanese—or performing ceremonial rituals. Indeed, although philosophers are not motivated by a concern for the same goods as merchants, insofar as they remain fundamentally self-interested, they too could accurately be said to be animated by the "spirit" of commerce.

If this kind of secular commercialism is an actual political possibility—to say nothing of a scenario in which "the Christian religion is forbidden" (4.3.11)—then Spinoza seems again to prod the reader to consider to what extent, if at all, such a society will need to contain the widespread belief in divine reward and punishment. At the end of chapter 5, Spinoza claims that Scripture's main teaching can be reduced basically to this: that "there exists a God, or a being that has made everything, has directed and sustained it with the utmost wisdom, and takes the utmost care of human beings, namely those who live piously and honestly. The rest, however, he punishes with many punishments, and separates from the good ones" (5.4.5). And yet, even as he claims that such beliefs "are extremely necessary for the vulgar," he also quite transparently indicates that the need to spread them arises solely from utilitarian motives, for it is necessary to impress "obedience and devotion in their spirits" (5.4.7). He claims, seemingly half-heartedly, that "the natural light" can make clear "that there is a God and what we have said besides" (5.4.9), but on the very same page he quite explicitly says that "experience cannot give any clear knowledge of these things" (5.4.7). In short, he seems inexplicably to contradict himself. For if it were really necessary for human beings to believe in divine reward and punishment, then it would also be necessary (as

Locke both suggests and does) for a responsible philosopher to claim that reason can indicate their existence beyond a shadow of a doubt. But while Spinoza seems to suggest this at times—and while his *Ethics*, for example, does culminate in an argument for immortality—he also accompanies those suggestions throughout the *Treatise* with explicit statements to the effect that the belief in such things is totally irrational and cannot be demonstrated by the natural light. Spinoza will provide a more complete treatment of this problem in chapters 13 and 14, but for now it will be helpful to ask whether, in repeatedly undercutting his own civil theology, he is not encouraging widespread critical reflection upon it. Indeed, in accordance with his earlier suggestion that there may exist the possibility of a kind of progressive mass-education, Spinoza now suggests that there is a need for a new clergy who can pick and choose appropriate lessons from Scripture in order to teach the vulgar "with a view to the weakness of their intellect" (5.4.15). If that weakness is a variable thing, then the pastors and ministers of the version of Christianity he is promoting, by selecting some passages from Scripture which they deem to be "more outstanding than others" (5.4.16), may be able to tailor their message in a way that is specifically designed to be appropriate for the particular mental cast of their flocks.

Spinoza thus indicates that the implementation of his project will require a kind of prudential religious statesmanship which will need to be carried out by the new clergy and by philosophically-informed intellectuals. Moreover, because the mindset of the latter will take its bearings by a sense of what is universal, it would seem already to contain the seeds of a liberation from the Bible itself—if only in the name of a greater

piety. In chapter 3, for example, Spinoza had claimed that whether or not the Bible acknowledges that God is the God of all nations "is in no way relevant; for the Hebrews cared to write only of their own affairs, not other peoples'" (3.5.21). The idea that there are many paths to God, it seems, necessarily leads to a distrust of traditional religious sources, for insofar as each sacred text declares its religion to be the only true one, a full respect for it is incompatible with a respect for religious diversity. Indeed, although chapter 6 is devoted to a discussion of natural science and the impossibility of miracles, its greater effect is to bring this kind of thinking to its logical culmination and thus to prepare the way for the full-blown assault on Scripture's authority in chapters 7 through 11. This is because it propagates, more fully than in chapter 4, a scientific religion which looks upon nature as divine and which also, under those auspices, discovers a religious duty to analyze Scripture as a scientific, historical document. At the end of the chapter, as previously mentioned, Spinoza forgets about his previous rebuke of Solomon and calls him "the Philosopher" (6.1.94). By cultivating an admiration for his outlook, according to which "nothing new happens in nature" and "everything happens by chance" (6.1.41, 94), Spinoza tries to inculcate a sense among the best educated of the vulgar that they are philosophers, which of course will also lead to a severe diluting of the meaning of that term. But Spinoza also notes that when Solomon ruled in Israel "the affairs of the Jews were in the utmost vigor" (6.1.41). Whereas the Hebrews were slavish and backward under Moses, who really believed that God rules as a prince (4.4.24), their polity flourished under the rule of a Spinozist. Political success, it appears, can and even must occur in a society where the ruling elites have been mostly liberated from a belief in a

personal God and in a universe that gives human beings special status. The task of chapter 6 is to lay the basis for a scientific-religious outlook that can bring such an elite into existence.

Now, as we have by now come to expect, Spinoza's theoretical arguments against the possibility of miracles are unconvincing. His claims that "nothing happens contrary to nature, but it keeps an eternal, fixed, and unchangeable order" (6.1.7) rest on the assertion that this has been "demonstrated in chapter 4" (6.1.12), even though he seemed to admit there that we cannot be absolutely certain of this (4.4.2). And as previously noted, he also admits in this chapter not only that we cannot prove the existence of "God" with absolute certainty, but also that this is nothing short of the level of proof that we require, for if there were even the bare possibility of miracles, everything could be doubted (6.1.21-22). The most that Spinoza can show is that for things to "succeed one another on the basis of prayer" would be "very alien to sound reason" (6.1.16), but, as he here seems to acknowledge, it is precisely the validity of reason that is at issue. In the following chapter he will admit this difficulty more fully by quoting without contradiction Maimonides' declaration that "*the eternity of the world is not shown by any demonstration*" (7.11.21; *Guide of the Perplexed* II.25). Since Spinoza is thus clearly aware that he cannot prove the theoretical conclusions which he is ostensibly arguing for, it would seem that his real intention, here as elsewhere, can be found in their intended cultural effect. This is also evident from the way the chapter begins—with a polemical attack on "the foolishness of the vulgar" that consists mainly of name-calling (6.1.1-6)—as well as from Spinoza's subsequent acknowledgement of this (6.1.7), and from the fact

that the allegedly serious arguments which he then goes on to present are often sophistic (e.g. 6.1.34). At the very minimum, it can be said that they depend on the very conclusion which Spinoza is supposed to prove, and so they mainly take the form of repeated, dogmatic statements of certainty which, as we have seen, he cannot justify (e.g. 6.1.16, 18, 23, 26).

If the serious core of Spinoza's refutation of miracles consists, paradoxically, in the effect which he intends to have on elite religious opinion, then his opening attack on the prejudices of the vulgar would seem to be of greater importance than it might otherwise appear. That attack consists of two main elements: a criticism of the commonly accepted division between God and nature (6.1.1-2, 4-5) and a description, which recalls the analysis given in the preface, of the reasons why the unscientific ascribe what they do not understand to God (6.1.3-4). As should not be surprising, Spinoza contends that both beliefs arise on account of a typically primitive or childish mentality characterized by devotion and admiration. Thus, the vulgar "call unusual works of nature miracles . . . partly out of devotion" and partly because they "*long not to know* the natural causes of things" (6.1.3, emphasis added). Their ignorance, combined with their desire for "profit or advantage" (6.1.1) leads them not only to oppose the sciences, but to wish to become more ignorant, and they yearn to hear only things which are beyond their comprehension and which they therefore "admire on that account" (6.1.3, emphasis added). Similarly, the belief in a dualistic cosmos "seems to have had its origin among the first Jews," who contended that God was a king ruling over nature because they wanted to convince their neighbors of His superiority to the natural beings, such as the

sun and the moon, which they worshipped. In so doing, they fancied that "the whole of nature was being directed only for their advantage by the imperium of the God whom they prayed to," and so, even "down to this time," many still accept the possibility of miracles because they wish to believe that they are "the final cause on account of which God created and continually directs everything" (6.1.5).

In Spinoza's description, the attitudes of human beings appear to be intellectual projections of self-interest, and so when that inescapable egoism is accompanied by ignorance and wonder it also results in the foolish notion that the cosmos is ordered for our benefit. This is why Spinoza repeatedly mentions the reported miracle of Joshua and the sun standing still (2.8.3-8; 6.1.19, 73; Josh. 10:12-13): because it reflects the belief that men are literally at the center of the universe, it would seem to be the example of a miracle *par excellence*.[112] The religious doctrine which Spinoza espouses in this chapter, by contrast, holds that God and the universe are united (pantheism) and that natural things are in no way oriented with a view to human benefit. It seeks not only to cultivate an admiration for philosophers but also to convince a new religious elite that they are philosophers as well, for philosophers "set true happiness in virtue and tranquility of spirit alone, and are not eager for nature to obey them but for themselves *to obey nature*—insofar as they know *for certain* that God directs nature as his universal laws require and not as the particular laws of human beings require" (6.1.43, emphasis added). That this statement is meant to describe only a semi-philosophic view is indicated not

[112] As Donagan points out (1988, 22), this Biblical passage was also invoked by the Holy Office when it condemned Galileo, and so Spinoza may also be suggesting that an end to anthropocentrism will benefit the cause of intellectual freedom as well.

only by Spinoza's rather dogmatic declaration of certainty, but also by the striking fact that, for the only time in the *Treatise*, he uses the term "obedience" in reference to philosophy. He had claimed in previous chapters that a truly free man will never willingly obey anything, and indeed, that even or especially one who recognizes that everything is determined will act in accordance with that determinism freely, or with the full consent of his spirit. By speaking here of obedience and associating it with nature, Spinoza thus appears to be drawing on a residual devotional instinct among his most elite sub-philosophic readers. Such readers still, if inchoately, think that they are free agents, and they yearn in their still vulgar ignorance to submit themselves willingly to something greater than themselves—if only, perhaps, with a view to some kind of long-term reward.

To cater to this instinct, Spinoza presents an account of the workings of nature that at times seems almost to encourage the worship of it. The philosophic view as he summarizes it holds that God cares "equally for all" (6.1.46), but this statement can carry two meanings. It can convey the authentic philosophic view according to which God is equivalent to the indifferent laws of nature, which care for no one, or it could imply that, precisely because He works exclusively through those laws, "God has a plan not for the human race alone but for the whole of nature" (6.1.43). In other words, it would appear to suggest that there is a great divine plan which governs the whole cosmos, and that that plan is discernable by human beings who study natural science. This is why Spinoza never denies the existence of divine providence in this chapter; on the contrary, he repeatedly says that we can understand God's providence *better* on the basis of natural laws, and not at all on the basis of miracles (6.1.8, 9, 20, 31). He thus encourages a way

of thinking which will prepare the way for chapter 16's equating of right with power, for he seeks to persuade scientifically inclined believers not to look for individual or particular providence, but rather to see everything that happens, no matter how it may apparently harm human beings, as a manifestation of God's perfection. He encourages such believers to admire a kind of resignation to a cosmic order in which they have no special status, but which, because it allows them to achieve the blessedness that results from recognizing this, really cannot be said to be *entirely* indifferent to human concerns. The contemplation of this order allows mankind to conceive of the "infinite" and furthermore to do so "under some aspect of eternity [*sub . . . specie aeternitatis*]" (6.1.30). Even as chapter 6 denies miracles, then, it also affirms a divine presence in nature which can give human beings some vague and undefined access to the immortality which their sub-philosophic confusions lead them to hope for. Indeed, he asserts at one point that nature is composed "not only [of] matter and its dispositions, but also [of] *infinite other things* besides matter" (6.1.16fn, emphasis added). In short, Spinoza's pantheism gives his new religious elite an opportunity to commune with eternity, and to do so furthermore by sacrificing themselves, for their admiration for a quasi-divine nature which is all-encompassing and which takes no account whatsoever of their particular fate allows them to lose themselves in the whole.

Once this is recognized, it is easy to see why Spinoza, despite his criticism of the Bible, was eventually considered to be not only religious, but a "God-intoxicated man." For he here outlines a new kind of piety which, precisely because it looks up to nature as something divine and permanent, also demands looking down on Scripture scientifically

as something merely human. To help potential adherents of this new religion wean themselves from the Bible, he uses the last two arguments of chapter 6 to show how the Bible can be read in a way that will eventually undermine its own authority. He begins by attempting to show that Scripture itself shares his own understanding of physics—i.e. that "when Scripture says that this or that was done by God or God's will, it understands nothing else but that it was done in accordance with the laws and order of nature" (6.1.47). But he also acknowledges that this claim is at best tendentious, and so Scripture's teaching that the universe is governed by nature must be "elicited by implication," or by drawing inferences from circumstantial details "which are by chance" narrated in some of the stories. Thus, he goes on to provide a litany of Biblical miracles which can be explained scientifically on the basis of tangential facts which happen to be present in the stories about them (6.1.49-62). In so doing, he provides future theologians with a method for re-interpreting the rest of Scripture in a way that will show both that it shares the outlook of modern science, and that, as a part of that outlook, it too considers reports of miracles to be the results of the practice—which indeed it also at times engages in—of catering to the devotion and admiration of the vulgar (6.1.54, 64). And yet, it would appear that not all Biblical miracles can be explained in that way, for he next asserts that according to his new religion of nature the belief in miracles is in fact impious, and if something can be found in Scripture "which can be demonstrated apodictically to conflict with the laws of nature or to have been unable to follow on the basis of them, it is plainly to be believed that it was inserted in Sacred Writ by sacrilegious human beings" (6.1.67).

Now of course, as Spinoza acknowledges, "we find a great many things in Scripture which do not seem able to be explained in any mode through natural causes" (6.1.63). It would therefore appear that much of it is actually impious and therefore corrupt. Spinoza thus suggests that many Biblical stories were written not by God but by men, and when men write books they do so in a way that either reflects their own bias or their own ignorance (6.1.70). Thus, far from sharing Spinoza's contemptuous scientific understanding of the sentiments of devotion and admiration, the Bible in fact reflects them. "For many things in Scripture are narrated as realities, *and are even believed to be realities*, which nevertheless were only representations and imaginary matters" (6.1.76, emphasis added). This is why the Jews at the time of Joshua believed that the sun stood still in the sky: because they thought the world literally revolved around them, and because they wanted to convince the heathens that their God was stronger than the sun and the other natural beings (6.1.73). Such incidents "do not have to be accepted as real by Philosophers" (6.1.77). Indeed, philosophers—which in Spinoza's present usage denotes a relatively large group of elite readers—can better understand the Bible scientifically, as a collection of human sources. "To interpret the miracles of Scripture and to understand on the basis of their narratives how they really happened, therefore, it is necessary to know the opinions of those who first narrated them and left them to us in writing, and to distinguish the opinions from what the senses were able to represent to the narrators" (6.1.75). In short, we need to conduct a scientific examination of Scripture which is founded on the presumption that nothing happens contrary to nature, that the Bible is the product of multiple authors who composed their work in an ordinary human

way, and that it therefore naturally reflects the ignorance and the prejudices that are present in all human documents, and especially in very ancient ones. In the next set of chapters, Spinoza will not only found a discipline of Biblical criticism, but also, in so doing, he will lay the groundwork for widespread skepticism and distrust of theological authority.

TRUTH, OBEDIENCE, AND CIVIL RELIGION

Space unfortunately will not permit a discussion of Spinoza's deconstruction of the Bible. But at the opening of chapter 12 Spinoza provides a helpful summary of it, which he puts into the mouth of irate orthodox believers who consider Scripture to be "an epistle of God sent to human beings from heaven" (12.1.1). Against such believers, Spinoza in chapters 7 through 10 shows the Bible not to be such an epistle but merely a human document, which was written by various authors over a period of "almost two thousand years, and perhaps much longer" (14.1.3), and which is therefore pervaded with the kind of contradictions, inconsistencies, and seemingly purposeless digressions that one would expect to find in a work which was not composed with a single guiding intention. Because he has claimed that Scripture "is faulty, truncated, adulterated, not consistent with itself," and "that we have only fragments of it," Spinoza predicts—correctly, as it turned out—that his analysis will lead many to "shout that I have committed a sin against the Holy Spirit" (12.1.1). Moreover, to this anticipated angry objection on grounds of piety Spinoza adds another, more measured challenge in his own

name. He confesses "that some profane human beings for whom religion is a burden" could derive "a license to sin" from what he has said. After all, once the masses cease to believe that Scripture is everywhere truthful and divine, could they not conclude that it is of no authority at all, and thus also that there is nothing which should hold them back from yielding to pleasure (12.1.8)?

This objection is of course not only religious but also political. It holds that a belief in revelation and in the Bible's unity is necessary for the maintenance of public morality. It has much in common with the objection against Deism which motivated Locke to write *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, a work which takes for granted the single, divine authorship of the Bible and which emphatically affirms the veracity of Christ's miracles. Spinoza's response to this objection will take up the next four chapters, culminating in the propagation of a civil religion in chapter 14 and in the articulation of a new and extremely puzzling way of understanding the relationship between reason and revelation: the "separation of philosophy and theology" that is achieved in chapter 14 and elaborated upon in chapter 15. The argument of this set of chapters should therefore be seen as an apologetic, or (in accordance with the *Treatise's* subtitle) as an attempt to show how the radical doubt which Spinoza has sewn about the Bible's authority can be reconciled with the demands of both true piety and civil peace. But before Spinoza embarks upon his attempt to "put away every misgiving" about whether his argument may encourage licentiousness and impiety (12.1.11-12), he acknowledges that "it is impossible to prevent such things" (12.1.9). Now, that a popular belief in Scripture's unity has not helped morality is abundantly clear from the "very

pernicious disadvantages"—the appalling record of persecution and religious warfare—which plagued Europe in the seventeenth century and which Spinoza discussed at the opening of chapter 7 (12.1.5; 7.1.1-7). But of course, even or especially when this is admitted, it would still seem possible to claim, with Locke, that what political stability requires is not a deconstruction of the Bible but the re-presenting of it as a unified and divinely inspired document whose sole purpose is to teach a single, consistent moral message. Spinoza's response to this objection will take up the next several chapters, but it is important to note here that his primary response to it is largely to concede it: he writes that since "virtue is quite rare in any age" there is no surefire way to prevent popular licentiousness (12.1.10). If freedom of thought and the flourishing of philosophy require the destruction of the "intolerable superstition" (12.1.5) which has arisen from the belief in the Bible's unity, it may be that Spinoza, for the sake of that goal, is willing to endure a greater political risk than Locke is. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, he presents no indication of any concern that the popular hedonism which he is anticipating will have an adverse effect on the attitudes of potential philosophers.

Spinoza's apologetic in chapters 12 through 15 consists in an attempt to show the extent to which a population can be brought towards a more rationalistic—but by no means fully rational—religious outlook. In chapter 11 Spinoza claimed that the prophets had written not as prophets but only as moral teachers, although they needed to make that morality understood by providing reasons accessible to the mental cast of their audience. Thus, just as Christ spoke of a kingdom of demons and a kingdom of heaven in order to win over the vulgar (cf. 2.10.7 with Mt. 18:10), the Apostles also used "signs" (i.e. tricks)

and provided other superstitious embellishments which the Jews—"who despise philosophy"—could accept (11.1.22, 48, 59-60). Chapter 11 ends with a clarion call to make "our age" happy by freeing it "of all superstition" (11.1.61), and in chapter 12 Spinoza quite radically suggests that that imagined liberation could one day extend even to a total disregard of the Bible itself. For, as the Apostles understood, a "thing is called sacred and divine which is designed for exercising piety and religion," and it will remain such "only so long as human beings use it religiously" (12.2.1). The holy, in other words, is only that which is necessary to instill morality or "devotion" towards God (12.2.4), and this can vary from one age to the next. Today "we can now do without" those superstitious embellishments which the Apostles put into the New Testament (12.2.37), and this is no less true of any given book, for to revere what is only "parchment and ink" as God's word is to covert "Religion into superstition" (12.1.6). In one of the most radical statements in the entire *Treatise*, Spinoza writes that if a book's

> usage perishes, so that the words do not have any signification or else the book is completely neglected, whether from malice *or since human beings do not need it*, then both the words and the book will be of no use and no holiness. Furthermore, if the same words are otherwise disposed, or else the usage prevails for taking them in a contrary signification, then both the words and the book, which before were sacred, will be impure and profane (12.2.5, emphasis added).

There could come a time, Spinoza thus suggests, when not only the more fantastic and irrational parts of the Bible could be disregarded. If human beings could find a grounding for a social ethic in an alternative source of theology, or even in a rationalistic ideology, then there is a very real possibility that the Bible could one day come to be

regarded as no more than a book of ancient tales not unlike those of Homer or Ovid—to say nothing of *Orlando the Furious* (7.10.9).[113]

But of course, whether the population at large could ever become wholly liberated, or entirely rational, is almost certainly doubtful. We know from chapter 6 that the notion of a God who cares for the just over the unjust is alien to the philosophic outlook, which holds that God cares "equally for all" (6.1.46). But the existence of morality, as Spinoza now acknowledges, requires that human beings retain a belief that God favors those who love their neighbor and practice the virtues of justice and charity (12.2.48; 13.1.8). Throughout the early part of the *Treatise* Spinoza had suggested that obedience, along with devotion and admiration, is not to be associated with a life of reason, but he now goes on not only to speak of the need for instilling obedience and devotion to God, but also of the need to do so by encouraging the belief that God is a judge who favors some over others (e.g. 13.1.10; 14.1.39, 41, 47, 51). Just why Spinoza claims that "all human beings can obey God" (13.1.10; cf. also 14.1.47) even though he later says that one who is led by reason can never do so (A.34) is a question whose answer will become clear only from an examination of the case for civil religion which Spinoza presents and the description of its possible content which he provides.

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113 When discussing the linguistic difficulties that present themselves to an interpreter of the Bible, Spinoza quotes the words of Pythagoras from Ovid, declaring that "gluttonous time" has taken from us "almost all the modes of speaking peculiar to the Hebrew nation" (7.5.35). This phrase comes from a speech in which Pythagoras is proclaiming the impermanence of all things, and so Spinoza may thus be hinting that because the Bible is a historical document it must also therefore be subject to all the historical laws of corruption and decay. Indeed, he may even be attempting to persuade his reader to consider Scripture from this point of view of Pythagorean impermanence—as a document whose eventual decline is both possible and inevitable. For Spinoza's comically-intended invocation of *Orlando the Furious*, see Strauss 1965, 144.

According to Spinoza, the purpose of both the Old and the New Testaments is "nothing besides the training of obedience" (14.1.9), but this obedience can be understood in a variety of ways. For the Old Testament only gave "the first Jews" a law written on tablets—in which obedience was guaranteed through the crudest kinds of rewards and punishments—because they were "no doubt . . . considered just like children" (12.1.4, 6). But Moses and Jeremiah (in this new presentation) both recognized that this would not always be the case. Because children can grow up and become rational, they preached "a future time for the Jews when God would inscribe his law on their hearts," which is to say, their "minds" (12.1.5). Thus, while Moses and Jeremiah promised that things would go well or poorly for the Jews depending on their obedience (13.1.27-8), Paul taught that God's Epistle is inside human beings "on the fleshy tablets of the heart," (12.2.15) and John claimed that "he who has charity, really has and recognizes God" (13.1.29). The Old Testament originally refers to God as *El Shaddai*, or He "who suffices" (13.1.13), and it is therefore appropriate for different people with different levels of intellect and education to regard Him and His justice in whatever ways are sufficient for them. At the lowest level of this educational ladder is the Mosaic view, which regards God as a judge who doles out rewards and punishment in return for ordinary moral behavior, while at a somewhat higher level can be found the view which Spinoza associates with John and which can be found in the *Treatise's* epigraph (14.1.28; 1 John 4:13). As Spinoza summarizes it, John appears to teach a kind of moral pantheism. He holds that since "*God is Charity*" (14.1.24; 1 John 4:8) one who loves his neighbor literally takes God into oneself or participates in His spirit (14.1.30). John

promises a reward that is less crude than Moses' piety—a reward which is intellectual and spiritual rather than material and bodily—but it is one which, because it is a reward, and because it is promised to some and not others, remains fundamentally irrational and vulgar.

Notwithstanding this, however, Spinoza claims that it is necessary for all human beings, "none excepted" to "obey God" and to follow at least some version of divine law in the usual sense of the term (14.1.47). He says that this is especially "salutary and necessary . . . in a republic, so that human beings might live peacefully and harmoniously" (14.1.51), and he thus seems at least for a moment to defer somewhat to the more traditional view according to which the freedom which republicanism grants makes necessary a set of moral restraints which only religion can provide. But since anyone could take from this a license to introduce whatever dogmas he wanted on the grounds that they are necessary for obedience (14.1.17)—and thus to begin a slippery slope towards superstition, thought control, and religious discord—Spinoza undertakes to lay out the tenets of a minimalist theology which leaves no place "for controversies in the Church" (14.1.38). Because "obedience is absolutely impossible" if the tenets of this theology are ignored, its dogmas are also those "of the universal faith" (14.1.37-8)—i.e. it is necessary for everyone to accept them. According to Spinoza, the sum of this universal faith consists in this: "that there exists a highest being who loves Justice and Charity and whom *all*, so that they may be saved, are bound to obey and adore by the cultivation of Justice and Charity toward their neighbor" (14.1.38, emphasis added). More specifically, it consists of seven dogmas which, it must be said, are replete with the

kind of sub-rational and anthropomorphic beliefs about God which Spinoza in chapters 1 through 6 had claimed to be completely alien to the philosophic view. Thus, all are to believe that God is "highly just and merciful, or the model of true life" so that they may "obey him, or know him to be judge" (14.1.39), and they must believe Him unique so that their spirits can be moved to devotion and admiration (14.1.40-41). Moreover, all must believe that He "holds the highest right [*jus*] and dominion over all things," that He bestows mercy and grace on us (14.1.43, 46), and that He is forgiving (14.1.46). Additionally, His worship consists only in actions, or in works of justice and charity, and all who obey Him "by this plan of living are saved, whereas the rest, who live under the imperium of pleasure, are lost" (14.1.45).

Spinoza identifies this civil religion as Christian only at the end of his presentation of it, when he claims that anyone who believes these seven dogmas has "Christ in him" (14.1.46). The effect of his argument, however, is to expand the meaning of Christianity dramatically, for according to these criteria a Jew or a Hindu who believed that there was "a highest being" (14.1.39) who sanctioned obedience would be no less Christian than a Protestant or a Catholic—indeed, this civil religion is not necessarily monotheistic. On the other hand, a Protestant or a Catholic who (in violation of dogma 5) believed that piety consists not in acts of justice and charity but instead in dogma and ceremony would not have Christ's spirit in him. Moreover, the capacious—not to say vague—character of these dogmas permits a great deal of toleration not only among different faiths which have been so liberalized, but also among human beings with different conceptions of what it means to be "saved." For although in speaking of

salvation Spinoza seems to refer to an afterlife, he never actually specifies it as such—the word *salvos* can also simply mean 'safe,' just as *perditos* seems to denote 'lost.' Thus, Spinoza also suggests that it is possible, in conformity with faith and obedience, to hold more or less rational versions of the civil religion. Indeed, Spinoza actually insists that each person is in fact "bound to accommodate these dogmas of faith to suit his own grasp, and to interpret them to himself in the mode in which it seems easier to him to be able to embrace them without any hesitation, but with the spirit's full consent, so that consequently he obeys God with the spirit's full consent" (14.1.49).

Thus, Spinoza suggests, it "has nothing to do with faith" whether God is conceived as "fire, Spirit, light," or even "thought, and so too for what reason he is the model of true life: whether it is on account of his having a just and merciful spirit, or since all things are and act through him, and consequently we understand ourselves through him as well, and through him we see that the true is the equitable and the good" (14.1.48). By raising this last possibility, Spinoza suggests that it would be perfectly in keeping with the demands of public morality for citizens—and perhaps even a great number of them—to adopt a philosophically-oriented, but by no means fully rationalistic, system of ethics. Such an ethic would define God as thought and would believe Him to be providential insofar as, by allowing us to think, He permits us to become one with Him and achieve our *summum bonum* by understanding ourselves. Even though this outlook would deny freedom of the will and hold that God does not "rule as a prince" but merely "teaches eternal truths," and even though it would hold "that the reward of the good and the punishment of the evil are natural" rather than supra-natural (14.1.49), it

would remain, in the decisive sense, superstitious. For by claiming that the universe is constituted so as to allow human beings to achieve their greatest good, it still would seem to contain a kernel of that anthropocentricism which Spinoza places at the origin of the belief in miracles and revelation. In contrast to this, philosophy teaches that man achieves his *summum bonum* only when he recognizes, paradoxically, that he has no special status—for the claim that God cares equally for all also implies that there is no distinction in status between the wise and the foolish, or even perhaps between men and beasts (cf. 16.1.4).

Spinoza therefore suggests that it is possible for society to become fully secular, although it can never become fully rational. Every political community requires obedience and devotion in some form, and it therefore needs some kind of public myth or ideology which can persuade human beings to make sacrifices—which is to say, to act irrationally by placing the community's good above their own. But it would appear that there is absolutely nothing in human nature which requires a widespread belief in revelation, or in a God who exercises particular providence in the ordinary sense, or even in an afterlife. And although one might assume that the number of citizens espousing such a partially liberated view would be small, Spinoza never says this. He seems to leave it as an open question whether society as a whole could accept natural religion or even perhaps take its bearings exclusively from a kind of secular, half-rational ideology. Indeed, Spinoza seems to craft just such an ideology in chapter 16 when he discovers a teaching about right in nature—a teaching whose irrationality seems to be suggested by Spinoza's comment that when Moses established his rule through a social contract he did

not obligate the Israelites by reason (14.1.10).[114] Spinoza's civil religion, unlike Locke's, therefore does not forbid the teaching of atheism, but it would seem to prohibit the propagation of any view that encourages citizens to disobey the law or not to keep the social contract. As he writes, faith "grants to each the highest freedom of philosophizing, so that he might *think* whatever he wants concerning any matters without impropriety; and it condemns as heretics and schismatics only those who *teach* opinions urging stubbornness, hatreds, quarrels and anger" (14.2.4, emphasis added). It would therefore condemn, or rather compel to silence, any who would follow Spinoza in teaching that the social contract is not fully rational or who would believe with Solomon that one should only follow the law when it is in one's interest to do so.

But of course, if Spinoza is serious about the need for a civil religion, one could again question why he is so open in fostering such doubts. After all, as previously noted, if philosophy recognizes a need to instill obedience in the citizenry, and if that obedience requires the propagation of superstition, would it not be philosophy's responsibility, and even its interest, to support this superstition by claiming that it is rational and true? This, however, is a step that Spinoza, in contrast to Locke, unequivocally eschews, and even as he argues for the necessity of civil religion he simultaneously makes a series of shockingly open claims which would appear to threaten its capacity to take root. At the end of chapter 12 he hints that the true reasons for his civil theology are utilitarian, for he claims even an unjust person would have an interest in crying up piety to others (12.2.53). But in chapters 13 and 14 he transforms this hint into a full-fledged claim

[114] This view also seems to be implicit in Spinoza's criticism of the Mosaic Law in chapter 2.

about the false and irrational character of Scripture's lessons about justice and charity. He claims not only that Scripture is directed to "the slowest" human beings (13.1.4), but also that it does not require that we possess "an intellectual or accurate knowledge of God" (13.1.11). On the contrary, because the Bible requires nothing from us besides obedience, it "condemns only stubbornness, not ignorance" (13.1.9). Spinoza therefore not only claims that the Bible's lessons about obedience are noble lies, but he also goes so far as to claim that it shares that understanding. He asserts that God extolled the "credulity and the faith" of the Hebrews, in accordance with which, although they lacked the "knowledge of God" which he now says Moses possessed, "they nevertheless believed in God's fixed and reckoned promises." Moses, by contrast, "had grander thoughts concerning God," and he therefore "doubted the divine promises" (13.1.18).

Although Spinoza writes that by practicing justice and charity human beings can imitate God "by a certain plan of living" (13.1.26), just five sentences later he contradicts himself and says that such a thing is impossible (13.1.31). He adds, however, that this is in no way a problem, for "the intellectual knowledge of God, which considers his nature just as it is in itself . . . does not pertain to faith and to revealed religion in any mode," and human beings can consequently "err about it astronomically without impropriety" (13.1.31). Because it is nothing to faith whether "the plebs and the crude vulgar" for whom Scripture was written (13.1.36) have erroneous thoughts about God, the Bible "*everywhere*" speaks improperly about Him and attributes to Him anthropomorphic qualities such as "a mind" as well as mercy and judgment (13.1.33, emphasis added). Spinoza makes this latter claim a mere three sentences after speaking of the agreement

between Jeremiah, Moses, and John about God's justice and mercy (13.1.30). He states that John's view of God is vulgar and accommodated to his mindset (14.1.29), and he thus seems to encourage doubts even about the elite, pantheistic theology which he elsewhere encourages. Even more radically, perhaps, Spinoza goes so far as to proclaim that the seven dogmas of his civil religion may "not have even a shadow of truth," although he also says that this is irrelevant "so long as he who embraces them is ignorant of their being false. Otherwise, he would necessarily be rebellious" (14.1.34). But of course, by proclaiming this so openly and transparently, is Spinoza not undermining the belief in their truth and thus encouraging this very rebelliousness?

This problem is only compounded, rather than resolved, by the rather bizarre doctrine which Spinoza now presents as his official teaching: the separation of philosophy and theology. He claims that this separation is "the chief intent of the whole work" (14.1.5; 14.2.5). Now, since in the preface Spinoza had claimed that "the chief thing I have set out to demonstrate in this treatise" is the possibility of a republic where freedom of thought and speech are protected (P.3.3), it would seem to follow that this idea of separation is somehow integral to the establishment of such a republic, or perhaps that it will be the primary tenet which characterizes the outlook of its citizens.[115] But of course, from a theoretical perspective, this doctrine is extremely strange, if not totally

[115] At the opening of chapter 16 Spinoza prefaces his discussion of political science by suggesting that it will be somehow a part of the discussion of the separation of philosophy and theology and of "the freedom of philosophizing that the latter grants to each" (16.1.1-3). This would also imply that the political doctrine of chapters 16 through 20 is in some way a continuation of the discussion of civil religion and obedience that is found in chapters 12 through 15.

incoherent. After all, since the truth must be either rational or contra-rational,[116] it would seem frankly nonsensical to assert that neither philosophy nor theology are superior to one another. Indeed, the notion of 'separation' itself would require a grounding which can only be given either by reason or by revelation (cf. 15.1.13).

In Spinoza's summary, the idea of the separation of philosophy and theology amounts to this: "reason is the realm of truth and wisdom, whereas Theology is that of piety and obedience" (15.1.36). Philosophy teaches "nothing but truth" (14.2.1)—i.e. it does not teach obedience in any way. Similarly, faith or theology, by which Spinoza understands "precisely revelation" (15.1.37), teaches "nothing but obedience and piety"—i.e. it has not even a shadow of truth. One who recognizes the truth will never obey, and one who obeys by that very behavior reveals his ignorance. Spinoza's analysis therefore points to the inexorable conclusion that philosophers are bad citizens. There is simply an insuperable tension between the demands of philosophy (the *summum bonum*) and the demands of politics. Although Spinoza suggests several times throughout these chapters that his civil theology "agrees with reason" and so "is universal for everyone" (15.1.38, cf. also 12.2.28; 15.1.53, 67), philosophers included, he cannot stick to this and repeatedly contradicts himself. Because truth and obedience are necessarily separate, "we cannot demonstrate by reason whether the foundation of theology—that human beings are saved by obedience alone—is true or false" (15.1.42; cf. also 15.1.44, 66). But since we know from chapters 3 and 4 that our *beatitudo* or *summum bonum* consists *solely* in knowledge of the true, and not in obedience, it would seem possible to go even

[116] As for the idea that there may be things above, but not against, reason, Spinoza insists that since nature

further and to state not only that reason cannot show whether theology's claim about our salvation is true, but also that it holds it to be false.[117]

Anticipating Locke's argument for the reasonableness of Christianity, Spinoza suggests that any such attempt, though admirable in some respects, would ultimately have a pernicious effect: in the final analysis, it would "call on reason for help in repelling reason and endeavor by a certain reason to render it uncertain" (15.1.59). For, although revelation is certainly "necessary in the greatest degree" for the political utility it provides and for the "solace" it gives to the weak-minded (15.1.57), to claim on that account that philosophy must mythologize or give its sanction to the possibility of miracles would entail too great a cost. Not only would it pervert the dignity of reason by making it once again into the handmaid of theology, but it would also effectively transform philosophy into the servant of society. Philosophy would then be compelled to orient itself to the concerns of the vulgar and the superstitious; it would have to transform itself into a tool for the procurement of the "goods of fortune" which most men covet. Indeed, the very dignity of philosophy according to Spinoza rests upon a liberation from such concerns, and so it is not surprising, from his point of view, that in order to claim that morality is reason's "great and proper business" Locke also had to surrender philosophy's status as the *summum bonum* and to present it as a tool for the achievement of security and prosperity. If Spinoza's imagined liberal republic is less stable and

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is all-encompassing this distinction is really not tenable (6.1.33).

[117] Smith, then, does not quite go far enough when he claims that Spinoza's discussion of the seven dogmas is "intentionally ambiguous" as to their truth. For he cultivates this ambiguity by deliberately undercutting them and by making more or less explicit statements as to their irrationality and hence also their falsity. Because the contrast which Spinoza draws between reason and obedience here is so stark, it

peaceful than Locke's, if it is filled with the tensions and contradictions that are reflected in Spinoza's own self-contradictions in these chapters about the relationship between reason and obedience, those tensions and instabilities might ultimately be essential in his view for allowing liberalism to achieve its true purpose: the authentic spiritual liberation of a select few.

When Spinoza claims at the end of chapter 15 that "everyone absolutely can obey" (15.1.67), he thus seems to be covering over the politically suspect nature of the philosophic life and to be crafting a popular but inaccurate admiration of reason as something that is ultimately on the side of society. He thus prepares the way for a teaching in the next chapter that will purport to discover right (*jus*) in nature and thus also to show that philosophy supports justice. When Spinoza next writes that there are "a very few" human beings "who acquire the habit of virtue from the guidance of reason alone," he therefore seems to be playing upon the ambiguity which he has cultivated between philosophic virtue and ordinary civic virtue (15.1.67). By blurring the great distinction between wisdom and obedience—or rather, by teaching that both can exist alongside one another—Spinoza encourages a line of thinking which will consider the philosophic outlook to be just in the ordinary sense, but which will also to some extent admire its liberated character. In other words, by propagating a dogma according to which philosophy and theology are separate, Spinoza is promoting a specific kind of muddled thinking in the citizenry. He assures non-liberated human beings that philosophers remain moral and on the side of society, but he also encourages them to think in ways

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seems mistaken to say that "he is operating with some conception of differing degrees of truth" (Smith

that are more and more self-interested and rational, but never completely so. By claiming that reason and revelation each enjoy the dignity that comes from inhabiting their own realms, but also that these realms are equivalent to that of truth and that of obedience, the otherwise nonsensical idea of separation encourages a respect for religion, on the one hand, and a healthy contempt for it, on the other. Because Spinoza undermines civil religion even as he argues for it, he is able to encourage a large number of his readers to think through its tensions and to undergo an educational ascent. As it is elaborated in the next five chapters, the final stage of that ascent will produce an outlook that comes as close as any popular ethos can to approaching the simultaneously self-interested and resigned outlook that characterizes the philosophic view of the world.[118]

NATURE AND NATURAL RIGHT

If Hobbes and Locke both predicted that their teachings on the state of nature and natural right would be considered strange,[119] Spinoza's would seem calculated to strike the reader as downright bizarre. For while Hobbes, for instance, had defined the state of nature as a realm without government, in which human beings have a right to those things which the advent of human law has not yet denied them, Spinoza finds natural right (*jus*)

1997, 115). Uyl (1999, 153-4) goes further and speaks of "the rationality of justice and charity."

[118] Thus, Smith's assertion that "none of the leading exponents of the Enlightenment believed even for a moment that political life could dispense with religion altogether" (1997, 3) stands in need of qualification. Since the universal religion of chapter 14 henceforth disappears from the *Treatise*, never to be even alluded to again, it would seem that Spinoza is noteworthy among those Enlightenment thinkers in (perhaps) seeking to eliminate even an unofficial public role for religion—at least as that term is usually understood. Bagley similarly places great weight on the importance of chapter 14 in arguing that Spinoza sought to establish a "a modern liberal-democratic theocracy" (2008, 225-6). For the possibility that Spinoza was attempting to replace religion with ideology, see Uyl 1999, 157.

in the very order of nature itself—an order which is in no way limited to the affairs of human beings, let alone those living in a hypothetical, pre-political state. The "Right and Institution of nature" is the regime, so to speak, "under which everyone is born and for the most part lives" (16.4.1). It is part and parcel with the "eternal order of the whole of nature"—the deterministic necessity which compels "all individuals" to exist and operate "in a certain mode" and of which each human beings is merely "a particle" (16.4.1). When humans form political communities, then, they do not leave the state of nature[120] but rather agree to be bound by the laws of human reason, which aim at their utility, and which do not encompass, but rather are encompassed by, the laws of nature properly understood (16.4.1-5.1). And yet, this fact only makes Spinoza's language about natural *right* seem all the more puzzling, since he himself stated in chapter 4 that the term "right" is "more properly" used to refer not to laws of nature but to those which depend on human willingness and which men make for themselves in view of some aim (4.1.1). Spinoza's equating of natural right with those actions which not just human beings, but all "the remaining individuals of nature," cannot help but do (16.2.4-5), would therefore seem to cut very much against the grain of ordinary moral discourse. If Hobbes had difficulty persuading his readers that a human being has a right to kill someone whom he merely thinks may be intending to do him harm, that claim at least remained one about human action and human choice. Spinoza, however, insists not only that justice can be

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[119] Hobbes, *Leviathan* xiii.10; Locke, *Second Treatise* sec. 9.

[120] Asked to explain the difference between his political philosophy and that of his contemporary Hobbes, Spinoza wrote: "With regard to political theory, the difference between Hobbes and myself . . . consists in this, that I always preserve natural right in its entirety, and I hold that the sovereign power in a State has

found among what would usually be considered amoral natural necessities, but also that it consequently exists not only among irrational and insane human beings, but even among animals and inanimate objects (16.2.4). Since justice and injustice in the ordinary understanding are qualities possessed by humans, many might question by what right men deserve to be subjected to earthquakes. But few would claim that an earthquake has a *right* to kill someone or simply to shake the ground. Yet this is precisely Spinoza's teaching.

Spinoza therefore breaks from Hobbes, and goes well beyond the pale of ordinary moral discourse, because he equates natural right simply with reality.[121] His teaching makes what *is* identical with what ought to be. Natural right as Spinoza conceives it is synonymous with "longing and power" (16.3.1). It grants to all natural beings whatever they wish to attain and can attain, and it "prohibits nothing except what no one longs for and what no one can do" (16.4.1)—which is to say that it permits everything possible and forbids everything impossible. A hurricane that destroys a house, a stone that falls to the ground and kills a man, and a predator that eats its prey all act according to natural necessity and therefore natural right. Moreover, because nature is a competitive struggle, claims of right can be similarly contested. Big fish eat small fish "by the high*est* natural

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right over a subject only in proportion to the excess of its power over that of a subject. This is always the case in a state of nature" (Epistle 50; Spinoza 1995, 258).

[121] It is true that in *De Cive* (ch. 1, sec. 7) Hobbes famously characterizes the impulse to self-preservation as "a real necessity of nature as powerful as that by which a stone falls downward." But the derivation of moral right from natural necessity is far from obvious, in part because the former requires human willingness and the latter entails a denial of it. At the very least, few would speak of the right of a stone to fall, and so it would seem problematic to claim that everyone will or should grant a similar moral right to self-preservation. Perhaps for this reason Hobbes dropped this formulation when he published the *Leviathan* four years later. Cf. McShea 1968, 137ff, with Strauss 1965, 229. For the relationship between Hobbes and Spinoza, see Curley 1992 and 1996; Gildin 1980; Strauss 1965, 225-50.

right" (16.2.2, emphasis added). Small fish have a natural right to swim away or to fight back, but on the whole they will be less successful, and the justice of the event can be determined solely by its outcome. In Spinoza, the idea of 'might makes right' is therefore not a cynical denial of all morality but instead a real claim about natural, and indeed, divine justice.[122] Since "the power of nature is the very power of God, who has the highest right to everything" (16.2.3), everything that occurs in nature, no matter how "ridiculous, absurd, or evil" it may appear from the point of view of our reason (16.4.2), should actually be seen as a manifestation of divine right and will. That we tend to regard what are unfortunate outcomes for us as anything but just is only a reflection of our own ignorance "of the order and coherence of nature," as well the fact that "we want everything to be directed on the basis of the use of our reason" (16.4.2), which seeks our own utility and our own preservation (16.4.1). Less superstitious and anthropocentric than the ordinary understanding of divine justice, Spinozistic natural right provides a moral approximation of the outlook of sober resignation, which accepts man's status as a mere "particle" of nature, that is characteristic of the philosophic life.

By enabling the most educated non-philosophers to accept a version of this view, Spinoza's teaching in chapter 16 once again tries to cater to anthropocentrism in order to undermine it. A few of those who look to science rather than religion as a moral standard will come to recognize that science provides no such thing. From the propagandistic enlightenment of the mass will follow the genuine liberation of a few, but here again it seems to be unclear just how far the former project can extend: the central practical

[122] Thus, Curley has written that Spinoza "is more Machiavellian than Machiavelli himself" (Curley 1996,

problem of chapter 16 is the question of how far the "freedom to think, and for each to say what he thinks, extends in the best Republic" (16.1.2). Now, that Spinoza's foremost aim is "the best Republic" should not be overlooked. Eschewing the relativism of Hobbes and Locke, he retains the characteristic question of classical political philosophy—but unlike Plato and Aristotle, his discussion of the best regime is meant to be more than a thought experiment. He thus seeks to attain the goal of classical and Christian idealism by constructing it on the foundations of modern realism, for he suggests that a regime characterized by the flourishing of man's *summum bonum* can be brought into being in practice, if only human beings can be brought towards a recognition that the universe is amoral, indifferent, and non-teleological, and that it therefore in no way points to that *summum bonum*. The central practical problem of chapter 16 therefore reflects a deeper theoretical problem: how can the flourishing of man's *finis ultimus* be achieved by cultivating a mindset which will hold—if often unselfconsciously—that the universe does not support that end? Or, to express this problem in political terms, how can a negative conception of liberty lead to the achievement of a high-aiming purpose?

Chapter 16 begins to provide an answer to these questions because, in addition to elaborating the foundations of the best republic, it also contains the fullest description in the *Treatise* of the way in which Spinoza understands our highest good. Indeed, the brief description of nature and human nature which occurs in its opening paragraphs comes across as a kind of snapshot of philosophy, or of the content of the wisdom under the auspices of which Spinoza and people like him view the world. Spinoza provides a

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succinct summary of this view when he gives his primary definition of the state of nature and natural right. "By the right and institution of nature," he writes, "I understand nothing else but the rules of the nature of each individual, in accordance with which we conceive each as naturally determined for existing and operating in a certain mode" (16.2.1). Aside from the determinism which Spinoza has already described in chapter 4, this statement has two potentially surprising implications. Firstly, it suggests that the primary element in nature (and thus also in the study of nature) is not the whole but the individual. Nature properly understood consists of rules which are specific to each individual and which propel it, so to speak, from the inside. More specifically, nature's "highest law" is that "each thing endeavor, as much as is in it, to persevere in is state—and to do so for its own sake and not for another" (16.2.3). Properly speaking, it seems, either there is no whole or what we speak of as the whole is only an aggregate of the each of its parts. It is a construction of the human mind that follows from observing the way in which individuals, who are locked in a never-ending struggle of competitive selfishness, are compelled to act. Thus—and this is the second surprising thing—nature's definition follows from the way in which "we conceive" it. Philosophy constitutes the world.

Because this picture of nature collapses the distinction "between human beings and the remaining individuals of nature" (16.2.4)—be they animals, plants, or even inorganic matter—it would seem to entail a kind of atomism. Indeed, Spinoza not only implicitly denies that human beings have any special status in the cosmos, but he abstracts entirely from all those larger entities which humans find themselves embedded

in throughout their lives. He assumes that the family, the state, and (as he will soon argue) religion are all purely conventional. He declares that the highest necessity governing human nature is a law which impels us to pursue what we perceive to be good (16.5.5-8), and this latter claim seems to complicate his picture somewhat. Indeed, he asserts not simply that natural beings seek to preserve themselves but, more accurately, that they wish to persevere in their states: cats want be cats, trees want to be trees, and humans want to be humans. Just as cats do not want to be lions and lions do not want to be cats (16.3.2), humans do not wish to become less or more than they are by nature. They experience neither a disgust with their condition nor a desire to become something greater, but they do have a rich desire to continue existing and operating in a way that expresses the qualities which make them who they are and which separate them from the other natural beings. Thus, the ignorant seek to satisfy their appetites because nature compels them to continue to live in such a way (16.3.2),[123] while the wise, for the same reason, desire "to live on the basis of the laws of reason" (16.2.7). They want to fulfill their spirits (16.3.3) by preserving themselves as rational or thinking beings. In its most fully developed form, this can only consist in attaining a clear-sighted recognition of the world as it is, and so it is part and parcel with the way of life that follows from the resigned, philosophic awareness of man's lack of special status in the cosmos.

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[123] Thus, although Spinoza speaks of longing or passionate desire (*cupiditate*) twice in this chapter (16.3.1; 16.5.16), it seems not to connote any kind of desire for self-transcendence. Indeed, in this section at least, he seems to use this term more or less interchangeably with *appetito*. Cf. also *Ethics* III P9 Schol.: "Between appetite and desire there is no difference, except that desire is generally related to men insofar as they are conscious of their appetite. So *desire* can be defined as *Appetite together with consciousness of the appetite*" (emphasis original). Later in Part III Spinoza derives from this scholium the insight that a man "neither strives to do, nor desires, anything unless it can follow from his given nature" (*Ethics* III P55 Cor. Dem.).

Now, since the philosophic life as Spinoza conceives of it is characterized first and foremost by this robust desire for self-preservation, it follows that it shares a certain common ground with the aim of liberal citizenship. Spinoza had claimed in chapter 5 that "obedience has no place" in a liberal-democracy (5.2.14), and he notes here that a truly free person—that is, one who is "guided by reason" (A.33)—can never obey God. Calling his own teaching about natural right into question, he indicates that once "this is known" what were previously thought of as rights "cease to be rights, and we embrace them as eternal truths, not as rights: that is, obedience goes over into a love that arises from true knowledge, as light from the sun" (A.34). Using the traditional metaphor for philosophic enlightenment, Spinoza thus once again indicates that the philosophic life is but the most fully self-conscious version of the thoroughly non-devotional psychological outlook which he believes to be at the root of all human actions. The philosopher as he describes him is not likely to have a deep or erotic love for the source of his knowledge, just as he would not love the sun in this way for allowing him to see. He will surely appreciate the sun for the vision which it permits, and so too he will enjoy the knowledge that flows, as it were, from the universe, and which in the end comes to reside within himself. But to claim that a life of wisdom consists in an intellectual dedication to something greater than oneself, or to say that it requires the individual to penetrate the truth of the whole through his intelligence, is to display a common misunderstanding—indeed, there is no whole, properly speaking.[124] To the extent, then, that Spinoza's teaching of natural right seeks to inculcate a moral approximation of this outlook, it

[124] Cf. Smith 1997, 143.

would seem likely to foster the creation of a political regime whose moral outlook is similarly self-interested and non-devotional.

But if this is the case, how could one understand the fact that Spinoza's name is also frequently placed in the camp of thinkers who are said to have advocated so-called "positive liberty?"[125] Indeed, it cannot be overlooked that Spinoza is also a member of that part of the modern tradition that attempts to carve out a place in the midst of liberal freedom for a rich communal life and for a spirited dedication on the part of citizens to the common good. He claims, in contrast to Hobbes and Locke, that human beings need to enter into societies "to live securely *and best*" (16.5.3, emphasis added). Now, this could mean, in accordance with chapter 5, that society is merely *necessary* "for the perfection of human nature and its blessedness" (5.2.4), but Spinoza here goes further and suggests that the *summum bonum* requires surrendering "the right to everything" which we have from nature, and bestowing it instead upon the collectivity of all citizens (16.5.3). Reason therefore is said to demand full allegiance to the common good, and those who live in accordance with the will of the collectivity will not only "not do to another what they do not want done to themselves," but they will also "defend another's right as their own" (16.5.4). The calculated self-interest that is reflected in the negative version of the golden rule also somehow entails positive duties and spirited obligations. Those who are in touch with their natural, rational selfishness should also come to believe that that selfishness is somehow at stake when the rights of others are threatened,

[125] Smith, for example, follows Isaiah Berlin in claiming that Spinoza understands freedom "not as negative but as positive liberty" (Smith 1997, 133, but cf. 144; Berlin 1969). See also his criticism of Berlin's characterization of Spinoza's politics as illiberal (*ibid*. 242 n.81). Cf. also Israel 2001, 259.

and so it would seem that they will also defend the rights of others out of a sense that there is a true identity between their own good and that of the collective.

But that such an outlook is not fully rational seems to be evident from the appeal to human pride which Spinoza now makes. He states that when they enter into the social contract human beings will agree to "direct everything solely on the basis of a dictate of reason (which no one dares conflict with openly, lest he seem to lack a mind)" (16.5.4). His imagined future citizens, it seems, will be governed in part by a deep sense of honor, or a pride in being rational, which will also be enforced through the power of public opinion. The social compact, in other words, will need to be grounded at least in part on an appeal to sub-rational emotions masquerading as a rational concern for utility. A pseudo-scientific myth is made necessary because no contract can ever be fully rational for all people at all times, and Spinoza is quite open about this. He baldly states that "no one will promise without a ruse to yield the right he has to all things, and absolutely no one will state promises unless on the basis of a greater evil or in hope of a greater good" (16.5.9). Promises made to a highwayman at gunpoint are of no validity once the danger has passed (16.5.11), and thus neither are those made to the state if there is no worthwhile reward or sufficiently fearsome threat remaining to sanction them. Because "no compact can have force except by reason of utility," no one but a fool would expect another to abide by a contract "forever" (16.5.15), and this is why all governments have historically sought to "compel all by force and restrain them by the dread of an overwhelming punishment, of which all are universally afraid" (16.5.17).

But while the ancient origins of states, according to Spinoza, may well have been little more than grand exercises in extortion,[126] it is not always easy to maintain a constant state of fear. As Spinoza argued in chapter 5, even if repressive regimes do not lead to rebellions, they rarely tend to produce vigorous and successful politics (5.2.8). But on the other hand, the lies and deceptions that can trick people into obeying of their own volition are suitable only for the most backward human beings. Indeed, as Spinoza notes in the next chapter, unless "they are completely barbaric, human beings do not suffer being duped so openly and becoming slaves" (17.3.15). Since Spinoza's liberal-democracy will be made up of partially liberated, mostly non-slavish human beings, it follows that it will have to dupe them in a way that is not quite so open. It will have to convince them, as Spinoza asserted in chapter 5, that by following the law they are not obeying at all but are instead pursuing their own best interests (5.2.13-14).

Thus, even though Spinoza has claimed throughout the *Treatise* that obedience is simply the antonym of freedom, and even though he just asserted that fear is absolutely crucial for the stability of any political order, he now suddenly claims that it is possible for citizens "to obey . . . freely," as well as out of dread (16.6.1). He insists that in a republic "whose laws are based on sound reason," one who acts in accordance with those laws "is not to be said to be a slave" (16.6.12). Rational laws aim at the utility of the subject, and so by doing "what is useful for the community" the subject also does what is useful for himself (16.6.14). Or, put more clearly, "the more a human being is led by reason, that is, the more he is free, the more steadfastly he will keep the city's rights and

[126] Cf. Curley 1996, 325.

execute the commands of the highest power whose subject he is" (A.33).[127] Subjects are therefore "not to be said" to be slaves because all political communities need to rest on noble lies, but the lie that underlies Spinoza's republic is noble because it most closely approximates the truth. The myth which it inculcates as a supplement for utilitarianism also pretends to be utilitarian, and so even as it covers over the lack of freedom which subjects possess, it also brings them closer to an awareness of the psychological engines that drive them and therewith to the possibility of authentic liberation. The democratic citizen's outlook therefore would seem to come to sight as a lesser or confused instantiation of the mindset of the philosopher. He will believe that if everyone were rational, "everyone would altogether stand by his compacts in the highest faith, on the basis of a longing for this highest good [*summum bonum*]—namely, preserving the republic" (16.5.16). He will share the philosopher's commitment to reason and to the primacy of individual self-interest which reason teaches, but he will also suppose—on what he will believe to be strictly rational grounds—that that concern for self-interest demands a zealous devotion to the community and even actions which, under any other public philosophy, would be considered sacrifices. Spinoza thus seems to hint at the doctrine of "self interest well understood" which Tocqueville would make famous. He suggests that in the future liberal-democratic moralists will need to invent elaborate

[127] Faced with this statement and others like it, it is easy to conclude, as many scholars have, that Spinoza believed that a free man will seek the common good, "[w]hatever the circumstances" (Israel 2001, 261). Thus, many interpretations of the *Treatise* too easily gloss over the radical individualism which Spinoza presents as the grounding for this kind of dedication on the part of citizen. Thus, Balibar, for example, finds in the *Treatise* a proto-Marxist teaching about history whose ultimate goal is the liberation of "the masses" (Balibar 1998, 25-49).

scientific theories which purport to show that by working for society's good, the individual actually furthers his own.

But while this belief, being largely ideological, would seem to echo in important ways the civil religion from chapter 14, Spinoza in no way suggests that it will require any kind of supernatural or otherworldly supplement. Indeed, it cannot be stressed enough that after chapter 14 what Spinoza calls the universal faith is never mentioned again. In contrast to Tocqueville, who considered religion to be a critical supplement to the doctrine of self-interest well understood, Spinoza now identifies the democratic citizenry's commitment to reason with a loyalty to scientific secularism, or, at the very least, with a hostility to orthodox religiosity. Again quoting Agamemnon's words from Seneca's *Troads*, Spinoza writes that even though the highest powers of a regime have the absolute right to command "the most absurd things" (16.6.4), because "no one holds a repressive imperium together for long" such things are much less to be feared in a democracy (16.6.6-7; *Troads*, 258). Because the citizens of a liberal republic will accept a diluted version of Spinoza's rationalism, they will be animated by the following thought: the highest powers have the power (and hence the right) to oppress them in every way, and hence also to command them to carry out religious absurdities, such as the human sacrifice that occurs in the *Troads*. But because they will be fully aware of this, citizens will not only distrust the government, but will in fact expect anyone with power to try to become a tyrant. Hence, they will consider it their right (because it is within their power) to be constantly on their guard against this possibility, which in turn will persuade the government "to consult the common good" and to "direct everything on

the basis of the dictate of reason," if only "so as to look out for themselves and retain the imperium" (16.6.6). Thus, as Spinoza writes, agreeing to absurdities "is almost impossible" for a democratic assembly, "if it is large" (16.6.8). In a republic in which citizens have been educated to look out for their rational, this-worldly self-interest, the freedom of the body politic would seem to vary directly with its size.

That a larger republic would be better off than a smaller one, according to Spinoza, can be attributed to the fact that it has a particular "foundation and aim, which, as we have shown, is none other than to avoid the absurd things of the appetite and to confine human beings within the limits of reason, as far as can be done" (16.6.8). Ancient republics were small, but they avoided the danger posed by irrational mobs through fear and superstition—and this, as Spinoza has shown and will again note in the next chapter, inevitably leads to political absolutism and claims of divine right. The republicanism of Greece and Rome ultimately culminated in the pious frauds of Alexander and Augustus, and this fraud has been perpetuated with even greater success by those who assert that "Majesty is sacred and plays the role *of God* on earth" (17.3.15 and context; emphasis added). A large liberal and commercial republic is the only alternative to divine right monarchy, and it can provide this alternative because it is the result of a particular kind of widespread education which attempts to dispel the darkness of superstition with the light of reason. After undergoing such an enlightenment, human beings will be able to follow Spinoza in looking upon orthodox religion not just as a potential source of cruelties and absurdities, but also as a product "of the appetite." The citizens of a Spinozistic liberal-democracy, in other words, will to a great extent share

Spinoza's own psychological understanding of the roots of religious belief. They will look upon it not as the result of a longing for another world, but as the product of irrational emotions and sub-philosophic desires, and they will take pride in being liberated from such slavery for the pursuit of rational self-perfection.

Now, at the end of chapter 16, Spinoza confronts the objection to this teaching on the state of nature which it would seem reasonable to expect from an orthodox believer. This objection holds that, because "everyone is bound . . . on the basis of a divine commandment to love one's neighbor as oneself," everything that Spinoza has just said quite openly conflicts with revealed divine right (16.8.1). This objection holds, in short, that we are not naturally free but instead come into the world with certain duties to exactly those things which Spinoza abstracts from—to family, to friends, to community, and to God—and furthermore that we naturally know this to be the case. Spinoza, however, bluntly responds that "we can easily answer this objection, if only we pay attention to the natural state. For it is prior to religion both by nature and by time" (16.8.2). He claims quite openly that human beings are natural atheists and that, as a consequence, both religion and religious duty are artificial constructions which have no basis in human nature whatsoever. Although the strength of convention may obscure this, any obligations that exist in actual practice are ones which we have freely imposed upon ourselves. Thus, they are not really obligations—for although Spinoza is clearly trying to cultivate a sense of obligation to oneself in this chapter, he has also repeatedly made clear that since a rational person would never obey, that too is an improper way of speaking. Since we do not long by nature to serve anything that is more than human, or

to become more than human, there may be "prayers" in the state of nature (16.3.3), but these prayers are nothing more than requests or entreaties (as the word *prex* could also be translated) for things that can fulfill our appetites.

Like Locke, Spinoza teaches that churches are human creations which therefore have no authoritative political status. But unlike Locke, he applies this insight not just to specific churches but to religion as such, for he does not claim that human beings are motivated to religious belief out of a concern for their "eternal estate." Indeed, the overwhelming message of this final paragraph of chapter 16 is that the belief in another world is just as artificial as religion itself. To be sure, Spinoza sees a residual need to appeal to the religious beliefs which still exist even among those readers who have stayed with him up until this point, but his attempt to cite the authority of Paul comes across as almost comical. For when Paul claimed "that there is no sin before there is law" (16.2.8; 16.8.5; Rom. 5:13), he meant not that human beings are free by nature, but that the law was given to mankind as a punishment for original sin. Spinoza, by contrast, teaches here that religion itself exists and should be accepted by human beings only on account of its potential utility (16.8.11, 15). Not only does he frankly deny that there is such a thing as natural religion, but he goes so far as to characterize revealed divine law as a contract—and we know that human beings have the highest right to break contracts when it is convenient for them. By cultivating an awareness of this, and by openly stating that a human being needs to obey God only to the extent "that it is useful for him and necessary for his welfare" (16.8.11), Spinoza seems to invite each reader to consider for himself whether it is worth his while to continue taking religion seriously. In so doing, he

cultivates a new understanding of what religion is—an understanding whose effect will be to push human beings as far as they can go back towards their natural state of atheism.

The outlook which Spinoza seeks to cultivate in a liberal-democratic citizenry, then, can therefore be described not just as secular and this-worldly, but furthermore as characterized by a refusal to acknowledge any ultimate source of moral or intellectual authority that is outside or greater than the individual. As he summarizes it in the next chapter, "it is to be granted to each to reserve for himself, of his own right, many things that, on that account, depend on no one's decree but his own" (17.1.4). This is almost a word-for-word anticipation of what Tocqueville would later identify as the fundamental principle of democratic political life: "the dogma of the sovereignty of the people" (Tocqueville 2000, 53).[128] Spinoza appears to be confident that a citizenry which has had its outlook shaped in this way will be a force for freedom. He seems not to anticipate, or at least not to be terribly concerned with, the possibility of majority tyranny which Tocqueville diagnoses as a danger to be especially feared in large democratic republics. Spinoza claims that democracy "seems the most natural" form of government because it also seems "to go along most with the freedom that nature grants to each" (16.6.15). But if democracy most approximates the natural state, might it not reproduce in society the insignificance which he says characterizes human beings by nature? In a modern mass democracy, where "everyone remains equal, as before in the natural state" (16.6.17), will each human being be but "a particle" of the body politic, and thus also isolated and powerless? Moreover, although Spinoza expects the democratic citizen to be animated

by a deep sense of pride, might not an individual contemplating himself in such a condition actually come to see himself as largely insignificant and worthless?

These questions will need to be considered more fully when we turn to an analysis of Tocqueville, but it will be helpful here to reconstruct Spinoza's potential response. And in fairness to Spinoza, it must be recalled that he understands the human desire for independence in a robust and spirited way, and he therefore does not expect a regime which gives free reign to that desire to produce what Tocqueville called "individualism." At the beginning of chapter 17, he writes that "the highest powers' right to everything" will always remain "merely theoretical" for the simple reason that "no one will ever be able to transfer to another his power, and consequently his right, so as to stop being a human being" (17.1.2). Because humans seek not just to preserve themselves, but to preserve themselves as humans, when their spirits are not enslaved by superstition they will necessarily display a self-assertive and self-affirming concern for their dignity. No absolute government can rule over free and enlightened citizens, because it would "in vain . . . command a subject to hate one who has done him a favor, to love one who has borne him harm, not to be offended by insults, not to long to be freed from dread, and many other things in this mode which follow necessarily from the laws of human nature" (17.1.2). The sentiments of hate and love, of pride and resentment, of fear and hope, are all products of the desire for self-interest which, in the vast majority of human beings, is inevitably filtered through the prism of the emotions. As Spinoza noted in chapter 5, human beings have a natural pride that can make them ungovernable, but this very thing

[128] "Providence has given to each individual, whoever he may be, the degree of reason necessary for him to

can also be a source of hope. For even though the vulgar are "not governed by reason but by emotion alone," they nevertheless remain deeply attached to their ideas precisely because they are *their* ideas. "Each deems that he alone knows everything, and wants everything to be modified on the basis of his own mental cast, and figures something is equitable or inequitable, a propriety or an impropriety, insofar as he judges it to fall to his profit or harm" (17.3.3). Our moral judgments, Spinoza suggests, are rooted in a concern for self-interest, but this self-interest is not limited the pursuit of material utility: it also encompasses the natural desire of each human being to live "full of his own sense of things" (20.1.4). We consider just or equitable what satisfies our demand for the honor and dignity that comes from intellectual and emotional self-expression, for when others accept the truth of our ideas and sentiments, they recognize and pay homage to our sense of self-importance, to our prideful individuality, and thus also to our status as real human beings.

Spinoza can therefore present the state of nature as a positive standard for freedom under government (16.6.15-18) because, in his estimation, men are in a way positively directed—although this positive-orientation can be best realized, paradoxically, when they are left free to pursue their own ends. Because human beings take pride in ruling themselves, both politically and intellectually, a republic can remain free to the extent that its citizens see themselves as members of a community of such self-legislating individuals—a community which can therefore call for service to the common good because it will also proclaim that that good is more or less identical with the individual's

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be able to direct himself in things that interest him exclusively" (Tocqueville 2000, 381; cf. also 62).

own. Spinoza's practical task over the final four chapters will therefore be to elaborate how a virtuous republic can be formed on a sober recognition of the inescapability of human vice. For from a realistic awareness of humanity's political and intellectual vices, Spinoza seeks "to constitute an imperium" not only in which "no place is left for fraud," but also in which "everyone, whatever his mental cast," will "put the public right ahead of private advantages—this is the task, this is the labor" (17.3.5; Virgil, *Aeneid* VI.129). Politically, Spinoza will seek to show how a negative conception of freedom can most effectively lead the majority of human beings to achieve the positive purpose for which they naturally strive. In a similar way, he will show that a regime which merely guarantees the freedom to philosophize will be sufficient to ensure the flourishing of man's *summum bonum*.

FROM BIBLICAL THEOCRACY TO LIBERAL-DEMOCRACY

Chapters 17 through 20 contain Spinoza's practical political teaching—but they present this teaching, at least to begin with, in a very strange way. Instead of simply describing the character of a good constitution, Spinoza suggests that, albeit with a few minor modifications, we can look to the "successes" of the Mosaic regime as a model (17.2.2). That this is obviously a red herring is suggested by a number of factors, not the least of which is that the title of chapter 17 indicates that the "divine Republic" was ultimately a failure—not only could it "scarcely subsist without seditions," but it eventually ceased even to be a republic (17.T). Additionally, even if one puts to one side

all the extremely negative comments which Spinoza made about the politics of the Old Testament in chapters 2, 5, and 11 (cf. 11.1.9), and even if one ignores the account of the development of the idea of divine right—as rooted in an ever-developing series of pious frauds—which immediately proceeds Spinoza's new description of the Mosaic regime, there still remain two huge problems. Firstly, as we have seen, Spinoza's liberal-democracy is to be rooted in a balance of power (or right) between the government and the people, and Spinoza dutifully seeks to uncover such a balance in the Mosaic regime (17.7.1; 17.9.5-6)—but of course, no such balance is possible when the government is held by an omnipotent God, as Spinoza claims that it was (17.4.8). Secondly, the idea that the Hebrews could enter into a social contract with God in the state of nature completely contradicts the teaching of the previous chapter, where Spinoza asserted that that state is prior to religion both in nature and in time (16.8.2). His forthcoming description of the Biblical polity would therefore appear to be largely tongue in cheek. At the very least, it is an attempt to disguise an innovative teaching as a conservative one. But it also seems to contain an attempt to show how the Bible's political teaching can be explained on the basis of his own rationalistic political science. Spinoza's practical political teaching, in other words, will emerge through a dialogue which he will set up between his own understanding of politics and that of Scripture. By following Spinoza closely, and by noting where the Hebrews succeeded and where they failed, it will be possible to piece together how he expects to arrange human political relationships so as to move society from a reliance on the Bible's politics to an acceptance of his own.

According to Spinoza, before the establishment of the monarchy the Hebrews experienced not one but three regimes, and the movement between these seems actually to foreshadow this transition from theocracy to liberal republicanism. After leaving Egypt, the Jews re-entered the state of nature, and they compacted together to transfer "to God all their natural power to preserve themselves" only after "they had experienced his wondrous power, by which alone they had been preserved" and without which they knew they would surely perish (17.4.6-7). God came to rule over the Hebrews in the same way that all the earliest governments came to establish themselves: by making it clear to them, in the manner of the highwayman from chapter 16, that they had no choice but to obey. But although Spinoza cautions that this theocratic constitution was democratic in practice—for the right to consult God, and to interpret and enforce the law, was held by everyone equally (17.5.1)—that democracy was abandoned at the very first instance when the nation attempted to do these things. When the Jews approached God for the first time "to hear what he wanted to command," they became "so terrified" and "so thunderstruck" that they were convinced they were about to die, and they promptly abandoned all their political rights and handed absolute power over to Moses, who was deemed to have "the role of God" (17.5.2-4). Their primitive fearfulness led them naturally to embrace theocracy and absolutism, but in Spinoza's initial presentation at least, it took only a generation for the Hebrew nation to progress to the point where they could accept a kind of religiously-based liberal republicanism. Moses enjoyed absolute sovereignty because he possessed a total monopoly on political, as well as legal and moral authority (17.5.6). But after he died he left no successor (17.5.9), and the regime

that arose after him was marked by a division between the secular powers who administered everything, and the religious authorities who guarded the law that held the people's hearts and minds.

Spinoza's articulation of the features of this regime revolves around the following question: how could the people remain free of government oppression, on the one hand, and zealously devoted to their polity, on the other? The official answer which he provides is that it was the separation of religious and political authority which accomplished this. The primary feature of the regime was the temple or "palace of God," and it was here, Spinoza says, that "the supreme Majesty of that imperium" was located (17.5.13). The high priest of the temple, which was chosen by heredity from the line of Aaron, was "the highest interpreter of the divine law," as well as "the one who gave the populace the answers of the divine oracle" and who "supplicated God" on their behalf (16.5.16). But while the Levites and the priests thus retained total moral authority, and were therefore held "in the greatest honor by the common plebs" (17.5.17), they in theory possessed no political authority at all. They owned no property, but rather were fed and housed at public expense (17.5.17), and they had no power to put the divine commands into practice. The latter power was held, in emergencies, by a commander in chief (Joshua) who ruled temporarily over all the tribes, who had the right to ask for God's answers, but only through the pontiff, and who furthermore could state these commands to the people and "compel the populace to do them" (17.5.20). In non-emergencies this power was held by the princes of individual tribes—or perhaps by some "councils"

whose character Spinoza does not fully describe (17.5.23)—who would have to receive God's answers officially before they gained the force of law (17.5.23).

As this summary should hopefully make clear, however, Spinoza seems to give contradictory answers to the question of just who had the right to communicate God's answers to the population. Or rather, it may have been that this power was contested, and thus distributed differently at different times. The boundaries of the spheres into which the religious and the secular powers were separated in this regime seem to be unclear, and this would appear to be a big problem, not only because religion had such a hold over the spirits of the common people, but also because, as Spinoza now goes on to show, it had a predominantly martial character. Spinoza claims that "God among the Hebrews was called the God of armies," and that in battles in which "the victory or defeat of the whole populace" was at stake, it was the physical presence of the ark of the covenant—and thus also of God Himself—that impelled the Jews to "fight with the utmost strength" (17.5.21). Their spiritedness, and their zealous dedication to the common good, was wholly a product of their militant religiosity. But because the final arbiter of that authority among the population was left ambiguous, that religion seems to have been a latent source of violence, civil discord, and inhumanity. Thus, Spinoza soon notes that after Joshua's death the tribes of Judah and Simeon waged a separate foreign war, during which they were reprimanded for the "sin" of failing to "exterminate everyone" (17.5.30). Whereas Joshua could command and control the divine answers, it appears that when such executive authority was lacking, there was nothing to keep a lid on this half-savage brand of religiosity. According to Spinoza, when there was not a commander

in chief the only bond holding the Jews together was that of religion, and if one of the tribal princes was perceived by the others to have transgressed the divine law, he "could be considered as an enemy by the rest" (17.9.1). Thus there would eventually arise civil wars which were rooted in theological hatred—"the greatest hatred" (17.8.5)—during one of which all the tribes invaded the Benjaminites and "butchered everyone, perpetrators and innocents equally" (17.5.31).

Spinoza claims that the members of the Hebrew tribes were fellow citizens with one another, but only with "respect to God and Religion." With "respect to the right that one tribe had over another, they were nothing but allies—in much the same mode (if you take away the common temple) as the Sovereign Confederate Orders of the Netherlands" (17.5.26). At this point, Spinoza bestows his highest compliment on the Hebrew regime—but it is one which even at first glance would appear to be thoroughly backhanded. In the preface Spinoza had identified the intended results of his own political project with an idealized Dutch Republic, and he now asks the reader to determine the character of that republic by imagining for himself what the Hebrew confederacy would look like, if only it were shorn of the very thing which bound it together. Since it was their shared loyalty to religious law that gave the Jews their common identity and their deep devotion to their country; since that law was also the key factor which both kept them from becoming rebellious and motivated them to prevent their rulers from becoming tyrants; in short, since it was the common temple which was the locus of all the allegedly favorable features of this regime which Spinoza is highlighting in this chapter, the reader is compelled to ask what could serve all these vital

functions in its absence. At the opening of chapter 18, Spinoza suggests that the Hebrew regime is not worthy of being imitated, not only because the New Testament has declared it to be obsolete, but also because it is incompatible with commerce. It is suitable only for those who would "enclose themselves within their own limits and segregate themselves from the rest of the globe, and hardly for those for whom it is necessary to have commerce with others" (18.1.4). In the Dutch Republic, as Spinoza will later note, it is commerce, rather than religion, which cements common bonds among citizens (20.6.4). It is therefore tempting to suspect that what will replace the common temple of the Hebrews in a Spinozistic liberal-democracy will be the spirit of commerce Spinoza alluded to in chapter 5—a spirit marked by a commitment to individual freedom, by a zealous attachment to the pursuit of self-affirmation, and by a fierce dedication to political and intellectual independence.

The contrast which Spinoza sets up between the Hebrew and the Dutch republics becomes especially acute as he catalogues the allegedly salutary features of the former regime. For as he does so, he appears to indicate that many of them rest on a parochial and even xenophobic outlook which is entirely incompatible with the commercial spirit. The Hebrew regime, as he now makes abundantly clear, was rooted largely in hate. The citizens successfully deterred their rulers from becoming tyrannical, but only because the latter did not want to risk provoking their "Theological hatred" (17.8.5). The republic remained free because it was guarded by a citizen militia rather than by a professional army (17.8.6-8), but the members of that militia fought primarily for God's glory (17.8.11), and the piety which impelled them to undertake such great sacrifices was

rooted in turn in "the most antagonistic hatred" toward other nations (17.12.7). Religion among the Hebrews, as Spinoza now makes clear, was not just militant; it was also a blood and soil, devoutly xenophobic brand of faith. The Jews considered that God could only be worshipped within the borders of the fatherland (17.12.7), and that worship itself consisted largely of "daily faultfinding"—a litany of invectives about other nations whose effect was to inculcate a hatred against them which "arose on the basis of great piety or devotion and one which was believed to be pious: surely none greater than it or more tenacious can be given" (17.12.11). And it was this hatred—when combined with their love of their own fatherland, to be sure (17.12.10)—which was ultimately responsible for firming up "the Hebrews' spirits for tolerating all things with a special steadfastness and virtue on behalf of the Fatherland" (17.12.13). In short, as Spinoza dares to write (albeit through the mouth of Tacitus), it was the "superstition" of the Jews that ultimately led them to fight with such heroism on behalf of their country (17.12.14).

Spinoza invites the reader to compare this theologically-based militancy to another foundation for spiritedness which he also claims to have uncovered in the Hebrew republic. As he writes, since the militia was formed entirely of citizens, "matters of both war and peace were administered by the same human beings. One who in camp was a soldier, therefore, in the marketplace was a citizen; and one who in camp was a general, in court was a judge; and, finally, one who in camp was a commander, in the city was a prince"[129] (17.12.3). In an urban, liberal, and commercial society—a society which is presided over by courts of law rather than by the authority of priests—the spirit of

[129] Here the term "prince" (*princeps*) might simply carry the connotation of "leader" or "first citizen."

commerce, or of individual, prideful independence, can provide the basis for real personal striving and a spirited defense of the common good. "Therefore, no one could desire war for the sake of war, but for the sake of peace and to protect freedom; and perhaps a Prince abstained from new undertakings as much as he could, so as not to be bound to approach the high Pontiff and to stand before him with loss of dignity" (17.12.4). In this presentation, it is religion that serves freedom rather than the reverse. Citizens show themselves willing to undertake great sacrifices because they desire peace and freedom, and they desire peace and freedom for the sake "of utility, which is the grit and life of all human actions" (17.12.15). According to Spinoza, it was because it was seen to protect this utility that (perhaps paradoxically), the Jews were willing to die to protect their fatherland. "For nowhere did citizens possess what was theirs with a greater right than did the subjects of this imperium, who had a part of the lands and fields equal to the prince's; and each was owner of his part *forever*" (17.12.15, emphasis added). This idealized Hebrew republic could claim the unconditional and self-sacrificial loyalty of citizens because it recognized and gave an outlet to their pride and sense of self-worth. The Jews according to this presentation were attached to their property not for the sake of greed or the desire for material well-being but because they saw it as the locus or representation of their dignity—a dignity that could never be taken away from them, for anyone who was compelled to sell his land on account of poverty was required to have it restored to him every seven years (17.12.15). Spinoza thus hints that in a liberal republic the preservation of the spirit of commerce might require placing some limits on commerce itself. These limits are made necessary because the aims of commerce are

spiritual rather than strictly commercial: they are intended to foster a sense of individual pride and self-affirmation, which, it must be said, is also linked to a sense of eternity.

But if Spinoza's description of the Hebrew republic shows how this concern for dignity could be properly channeled, it also contains a warning about what could happen if this solution is not put into practice. He claims that one of the chief things which deterred the Hebrews' princes from becoming tyrants was "the fear of some new Prophet," for "such men could easily pull an oppressed populace to themselves." The prophets, in other words, acted as lightning rods for those who were discontented or suffering under misrule, and they only needed to provide "superficial signs" in order to persuade such people "of whatever they wanted." But whereas misrule tended to create bubbling religious pressure among the lowest segments of society, when "things were correctly administered" the princes could assert their authority and control these prophets. Because the prophets had no popular following, the government could either put them to death under the law, or it could accept them, but solely on the basis of its own legal authority (17.10.1). But unfortunately, according to Spinoza, for most of the Hebrews' history this situation was the exception rather than the rule. Indeed, he notes that the Hebrew state largely sought to keep the populace under control not by making it better off, and not by satisfying its demands for dignity, but instead by inculcating obedience through an almost unbelievably intrusive religious cult. Repeating his teaching from chapter 5, Spinoza again catalogues how the whole point of the Jewish law was to instill "the utmost training in obedience," and in fact, to transform life into "a continual cult" of it (17.12.19). And in this, their law was most successful. For, as Spinoza writes, "I do

not deem that anything more effective can be devised to influence the psyches of human beings. For psyches are taken by no thing more than the joy that arises on the basis of devotion, that is, on the basis of love and admiration together" (17.12.21). Although Spinoza seems to come very close here to encountering on its own terms the human experience of devotion, or of the sense of joy that can arise from carrying out duties to something greater than oneself and perhaps even from sacrificing oneself, he also leaves no doubt that he does not regard this sentiment as admirable in the least. The joy that arises from it, in his presentation, is akin to the joy experienced by a slave who delights in his slavishness and who could not even conceive of being free. It is the joy of a slave who would fight to keep his chains, not realizing that his psyche has been "taken" by another, and thus that this very sentiment is what makes him most of all a slave and "useless to himself" (16.6.12). As Spinoza claimed in chapter 16, "he alone is free who lives with a full spirit solely on the basis of the guidance of reason" (16.6.10). The Hebrews, by contrast, were required to accept the edicts of the divine law "without any consultation with reason" at all (17.12.25).

But even though Spinoza just said that there is nothing more effective than the use of devotion to control human beings, Spinoza now indicates that, for whatever reason, that was almost certainly not the case among the Jews. Indeed, he goes so far as to blame them for the torrent of discords and civil wars that eventually enveloped the Hebrew nation (7.12.31ff.). The problem, it seems, was that people simply could not stand living under a regime in which they were constantly told what to think. They bristled at the theological authority held by the Levites, who "were in the habit of reproving them

continually. For there is no doubt that, among so many thousands, many annoying Theologizers were found" (17.12.36). That the Levites had no official political power was entirely irrelevant. They had an intellectual power, and an honored place in society, and (as Spinoza made clear in chapter 5), there is nothing that human beings can stand less. Thus, there was often popular resentment against the religious establishment, and the Hebrews murmured about having to feed those who were unrelated to them, "especially if grain was costly" (17.12.37). That this resentment had a spiritual, rather than simply an economic cause, however, seems to be indicated by the fact that it was in no way limited to times of poverty. Indeed, Spinoza notes that it was especially "in times of leisure, when manifest miracles ceased," and when no prophets appeared, that the Jews "at last abandoned the worship" of God, which was "ignominious and even suspect to them" (17.12.38). Indeed, Spinoza indicates that it was the elite, "and not men of the plebs" who especially began to murmur against the rule of Moses when "the populace began to abound in leisure in the desert" (17.12.43). It was wealth and not poverty, the free time provided by leisure and not the crush of economic necessity, which led human beings to discover a concern for their individual dignity—an egalitarian concern which, in turn, led them to a series of religious doubts. When they finally rebelled, these elites publicly accused Moses of being an imposter, and they claimed that this was proved by the fact that he "chose his own tribe above all and gave the right of the pontificate to his brother forever. On that account, they went to him in an excited tumult, shouting that everyone was equally holy and that he had raised himself above everyone contrary to right" (17.12.43).

Perhaps paradoxically, then, Spinoza here seems to indicate that the concern for a democratic and egalitarian notion of human dignity can be expected to arise first and foremost among an educated, leisured elite. That concern may well be a product of the discovery of the possibility of spiritual freedom—a freedom which is egalitarian insofar as it exists only within each, and which is of course open only to the most educated segments of the population. Spinoza juxtaposes this sentiment to that which was cultivated by Moses, for Moses, as he now indicates, was able to calm this popular disturbance only through a miracle. But this miracle only caused "a new and universal sedition *of the whole populace*" (17.12.44, emphasis added). What started as a rebellion of the educated had now spread to the whole nation, which universally considered this 'miracle' to have been a fake. Finally, a "worn out" Moses "calmed them at last after a great disaster or pestilence, *yet so that everyone preferred dying to living*" (17.12.44, emphasis added). Whereas this rationalistic, anti-theological, and democratic-leaning elite seemed to promise an awakening of the human spirit, Moses' religion could maintain civil order only by trying to crush it. Here Spinoza's estimation of the ultimate results of Bible's politics could not be clearer, for he notes that the Hebrews' polity was so disordered and so miserable that the Jews eventually simply gave up on freedom and begged God for a monarch (17.12.49). "Yet here was immense material for new seditions, on the basis of which the ruin of the whole imperium followed at long last" (17.12.50).

The most lasting achievement of the establishment of a monarchy, according to Spinoza, was the unleashing of a hitherto unprecedented amount of political ambition—

something which was manifest most of all in a conflict between kings and priests (17.12.52ff.). But as Spinoza presents it, this conflict seems to be but the ultimate realization of the tension between the spiritual and the secular authority that was latent in this regime all along. The same prophets who previously served as a healthy check on governmental power now became a constant source of resistance to legitimate kings—indeed, even David acquired the throne through an act of usurpation (17.12.54). Moreover, the prophets themselves seem largely to have been a product of the lack of opportunity for spiritual self-expression that is part and parcel with monarchy, for while the populace held the imperium "there were very few prophets," whereas "after the choosing of Kings there were very many of them at the same time" (18.3.7). Monarchy seems to have created an atmosphere of restless discontent which was given an overt religious expression, as literally hundreds of prophets swarmed around Israel.

The political lesson which Spinoza draws from this is two-fold. On the one hand, he writes, the government needs to possess a total monopoly on religious authority—this is the main teaching of chapter 19. Not only must "the ministers of the sacred matters" be denied all access to all political offices, but they must limit themselves to "teaching and practicing only what is acceptable and most usual" (18.4.1). Moral authority must come from the state, and the churches should limit themselves to reinforcing the code of ethics underlying the regime. And in a liberal-democracy, that will entail placing "piety and Religious worship solely in works"—that is, in obeying the law, helping one's neighbor, and being a good citizen by cultivating "charity and justice" (18.4.5). Secondly, Spinoza claims that it is necessary to grant freedom of thought and expression.

So while the government needs to have exclusive jurisdiction over religion, as Spinoza will argue at the opening of chapter 20, it will best utilize that right when it limits religion to a teaching about works and allows citizens to think as they like. For where opinions are criminalized "one is ruled very violently." Spinoza claims that this kind of political atmosphere is what led to the crucifixion of Christ (18.4.2), but, when this statement is put together with what Spinoza said about Jesus in chapter 7 (7.5.8-14), it would also appear to be what led to the appearance of Christ. The corruption of the Hebrew republic, and the yoke of Roman tyranny, one is tempted to suspect, created an atmosphere of bubbling religious pressure not unlike that which was faced by the Hebrew kings. Indeed, as Spinoza now goes on to indicate, that Christ preached not political rebellion, but a kingdom in another world, seems not have made the religion which he authored any less seditious than that of the Jewish prophets who preceded him.

In chapter 19, Spinoza notes that the dissension between the religious and the secular authorities which was the source of all the trouble in the Hebrew regime has always been endemic to Christianity. It can be traced back not just to the conflict between Ambrose and Theodosius Caesar (19.1.1) but even, as he remarkably insists, to "the very origins of the Christian religion" (19.3.3). Of course, to any truly pious Christian "the very origins of the Christian religion" are divine, and Spinoza, as he did when discussing the faults of the Hebrew laws (17.12.31-33), almost explicitly places the blame for this on God Himself. He says that "the first to teach the Christian religion were not kings but private men" (19.3.3), and from this seed grew a quarrel between the authority of church and state which would plague Europe from the late Roman Empire

until Spinoza's own time. Now of course, Christ himself was a private man. Indeed, Spinoza's claim that the Apostles could be excused from preaching without government authorization because they had authority from Christ (19.2.13) only begs the question of how he came to have that authority.[130] And if Christ had this right from God, then that only compels one to ask why God would want to divide Europe into competing centers of moral and political authority—something which has had disastrous results. Spinoza claims that God punished the Hebrews with bad laws because His intention was not to care for them but to punish them: His cares "were not for security, but for vengeance" (17.12.33). Since the Jews, according to Spinoza's presentation, were a narrow-minded and hate-filled people, it should not be surprising that they believed in a God who had a similar mindset. As chapter 19 indicates, a version of that same God remains the dominant force in the Europe of Spinoza's time, and He has brought nearly identical political effects.

Spinoza's description of the dysfunctional Hebrew confederacy therefore seems to be an allegory for Christian Europe—a group of principalities ostensibly united by a common religion, but in practice inextricably divided by that very source of piety which was supposed to provide a firm foundation for peace and concord. The alternative theological outlook which Spinoza proposes in its stead is perhaps best summarized by his famous statement that, since God rules over human beings only through the mediation of earthly government, "no traces of divine justice are found except where just men rule"

[130] Thus Rosenthal does not quite go far enough when he blames the Disciples for threatening the civil authority (1999, 123ff.). Of course, if Christian morality is defective from Spinoza's point of view, that

(19.1.20). The outlook encapsulated in this statement is the culmination of Spinoza's efforts, over the last nineteen chapters, to bring the religious attitudes of the vulgar—though with many variations, to be sure—towards a version of the philosophical view of the world. He here again mentions Solomon, who observed that where just men do not rule "the same fate happens to the just and the unjust, the pure and the impure: this has made very many doubt divine providence who deemed that God rules over human beings immediately and directs the whole of nature for their use" (19.1.20). On the basis of this skepticism about divine providence, Spinoza presents a teaching which claims not to deny God's justice, but indeed to vindicate it at long last. He suggests that divine justice is real, but that that reality is made manifest only as an effectual truth. God has commanded human beings to make for themselves in this world what the Bible promises in the world to come. And because the human concern for piety is rooted in a concern for justice, as Spinoza suggested when he contrasted Christ and Moses in chapter 7, wherever justice is guaranteed and secured people will not challenge the government's authority in the name of something otherworldly. In other words, under a regime which does not insult people's dignity by telling them what to think, there will be no more crucifixions of people like Jesus, but there will also be no more people like Jesus to crucify.

The teachings of chapters 19 and 20 are therefore not as contradictory in practice as they would seem to be in theory—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the contradiction is a dynamic one, and that it effectively creates a healthy middle position.

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should be one more reason to question whether Spinoza's favorable portrayal of Jesus in chapter 1 is meant

When people are well off, when their desire for individual dignity is satisfied because they are granted freedom of speech and thought, they will consent to state supremacy over religion because they will no longer take religion all that seriously. Or rather, they will believe religion to be on the side of peace, humanity, and freedom of expression, which will justify any state actions conducted for the sake of those ends. To express this somewhat differently, it can be said that the political control of religion of chapter 19 will remain present in the liberal and tolerant society of chapter 20—but it will be located not in governmental pronouncements but instead in the less noticeable power which all regimes have to shape ideas and sentiments (cf. 17.1.9).

Thus, although Spinoza opens chapter 20 by claiming that it is simply impossible for the government to control thoughts, he then blatantly contradicts himself and says that it could be guaranteed by an art (cf. 20.1.2 with 20.1.4). This contradiction can be resolved, as it were, in effect, in a society in which the citizens' beliefs have been shaped without their knowing it such that they universally accept the premise that thought control is impossible. For this reason, Spinoza in this chapter presents a description of life under a democratic republic as though it is a description of human nature simply (cf. 20.1.5). The principle of toleration that is part and parcel with liberalism must be founded upon a new understanding of what religion is, and it must exclude, as both impious and as a threat to the civil peace, all those sects which fail to accord with it because they fail to preach tolerance. A regime of freedom of thought is still a regime, and, it therefore requires a religious teaching which must be enforced through education

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to be his last word on the subject.

and public opinion (cf. 7.11.44-47).[131] As Spinoza had claimed at the opening of chapter 17, all polities inevitably shape psyches so that people come to believe, love, and hate some things rather than others (17.1.9). But even though a democratic republic will mold beliefs in a tremendously powerful way, that will in no way prevent it from achieving its highest, intellectual aim and purpose. For, according to Spinoza, the arts and sciences, which are necessary "for the perfection of human nature and its blessedness" (5.2.4), "are only cultivated with happy success by those who have judgment that is free and *minimally* predisposed" (20.4.19, emphasis added). Philosophy will need to grow from the seeds planted by a certain minimal dogmatism. Although the truly gifted can become free anywhere (A.33), a great many can be helped towards this end if they are "compelled to live well on the basis of the freedom of the spirit" (2.9.23). And as the context of that latter statement would seem to suggest, this possibility will be present only in an atmosphere which has been decisively liberated from Biblical politics.

The final mention of the Bible in the *Treatise* concerns Moses' utter failure as a statesman (20.1.5). Here Spinoza's criticism of the Old Testament is not followed, as at so many other points in the *Treatise*, by a favorable comment about the New Testament. From here until the end of the book, Scripture will no longer serve as an authority for Spinoza. The kind of politics that Moses represents will be left by the wayside, as will be the Bible itself. At this final stage in Spinoza's educational project, the *Treatise*, along with the regime it is trying to construct and the soul that it will nurture, has become entirely secular.

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[131] For the homogenizing potential of Spinoza's religious reforms, and for the new role for public opinion

Now, the overwhelming message of chapters 17 through 20 is that theocracy is bound to fail because, as Moses learned, the attempt to control minds rests on a misunderstanding of human nature. But Spinoza also says that "judgment can be predisposed in many, almost unbelievable modes" (20.1.4) and that a government can therefore "make the greater part of human beings believe" or love or hate "whatever it wants" (17.1.9). The problem with theocracy is thus not that it will always fail, but that, on the contrary, it has the frightening potential to succeed. Spinoza, it should be recalled, began the *Treatise* by noting that the Turks have accomplished this "most happily" (P.2.4). For Spinoza, Islam represents the completion of a trajectory that is latent in all religiously-based politics; theocracy is the classical solution to the problem of regime stability, and it is founded on a recognition that human beings can be successfully controlled only when they have lost the ability to think for themselves. Civil peace is therefore not Spinoza's foremost goal. If it was, he would have endorsed Turkish-style despotism instead of liberal-democracy, which, on account of the freedom it grants, has some "disadvantages" (20.4.16). Moreover, because democracy rests on the mutual deterrence—and hence, the risk of confrontation—between rulers and ruled, to establish it is to risk enduring a number of political sacrifices. But those sacrifices, as previously noted, will be more than made up for by the presence of the arts and sciences, which cannot exist where minds are not free (20.4.19).

The republican outlook which Spinoza describes in chapter 20 applies the political lessons of chapter 16 to the realm of ideas and sentiments. As in chapter 16, it

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which they are likely to create, see Gildin 1973, 385-7.

consists primarily in an awareness of the ubiquity of selfishness, and it views the evident lack of moral restraints among human beings in moral terms. As Spinoza writes, the highest powers even in a republic have the right to "consider as an enemy everyone who does not absolutely think as they do in everything; but we are not disputing about their right, but about what is useful" (20.2.2).

> For I grant that by right they can rule most violently and lead citizens to the slaughter for the flimsiest of causes: but everyone will deny that this can come about in keeping with the judgment of sound reason. Indeed, since they are unable to do these things without great danger to the whole imperium, we can also deny that they have the absolute power to do these and similar things, and consequently the absolute right as well. For we have shown that the right of the highest powers is determined by their power (20.2.2).

When both rulers and ruled think in ways that are determined by the insights of "sound reason"—that is, when they are concerned with their power and interest in this world, rather than with their eternal fate in the next—their selfish calculations will lead them to a common recognition of the benefits of peace and moderation. But this balance of power that will be established between them will be moral as well as material. As previously indicated, citizens who believe that their government has an actual right to oppress them will be constantly on their guard against such a possibility, and their consciousness of their own rights—of the fact that they can resist government encroachments legitimately with all of their power—will instill in them a desire not to be oppressed. The moral dimension of this balance is therefore not just window-dressing. It is what gives citizens their spiritedness, and in so doing it ensures that their rulers do not become tyrants and that they do not become slavish.

Moreover, since human beings are intellectual and emotional beings, when they adopt this moral reasoning they will also zealously guard against the possibility that the government will intrude into their psyches (20.1.3) or tell them what emotions to exhibit (20.2.1). Even though the outlook of democratic citizens will be characterized by an attachment to irrational ideas and to emotions, it will thus share something of the commitment to spiritual independence typical of the philosopher. Indeed, the philosopher's desire to live by his own lights, and to trust no authority but his own, now appears to be the most fully developed manifestation of a sentiment which is found to some extent in all human beings. As Spinoza writes, even though thought-control is abundantly possible, "it still has never come about that human beings fail to experience that each is full of his own sense of things, and that there are as many distinctions among heads as there are among palates" (20.1.4). Because both the philosopher and the citizen are deeply attached to their own spiritual independence, Spinoza's liberal republicanism will seek to create an atmosphere friendly to the former by bestowing legitimacy upon the sense of individuality which he shares with the latter. In other words, rather than lowering ideas to level of tastes, his solution will seek to raise tastes to the level of ideas. It will protect serious thinking by cultivating, and conferring dignity upon, a personal attachment to all human sentiments, even those which, from the Olympian vantage point of the philosopher, would come to sight as trivial or grounded in unreason and emotion. Spinoza seems to envision a world in which human beings are encouraged to develop and take pride in their own tastes, to form judgments about the likes of literature, philosophy, and the arts, and to become deeply offended when anyone, and especially the

government, challenges those judgments or tells them what to think. In the new ethos, such challenges will be considered offensive because they imply a denial of one's capability to form such judgments, or to live as an independent, dignified, thinking being.

Spinoza argues for freedom of speech, and not just freedom of thought, on the somewhat bizarre grounds that it is as impossible to prevent human beings from voicing their ideas as it is to prohibit them from having ideas, for "not even the most experienced, to say nothing of the plebs, know how to be silent" (20.3.1). Of course, the *Treatise* as a whole would seem to testify to the ability of a wise man to write carefully, and to craft his message delicately, in full awareness of the reality of social and government censorship (cf. P.7.1-2; 20.8.1-2). "*Caute*" was the motto on Spinoza's personal seal, and indeed, he here calls this tendency of human beings to entrust their opinions to others even if there is a need for silence "a common vice" (20.3.1). But as in chapter 17, Spinoza will attempt to construct a society that can produce virtue by building on the realistic foundations of human vice (cf. 17.3.3-4). Liberal-democracy will not prohibit vices such as luxury, envy, greed, and drunkenness for the simple reason that it cannot do so. By granting freedom to the human spirit, one necessarily liberates and therefore incurs the need to tolerate such vices, but that same liberation also permits freedom of judgment, which is a virtue (20.4.18). "The aim of a Republic," according to Spinoza, is to allow the minds and bodies of human beings "to function safely in their functions" (20.4.2). The freedom which it permits ensures man's ability to preserve himself in both an ordinary and a rich sense: the liberation of the mind will advance together with the liberation of the body. Spinoza's republicanism therefore seeks to achieve a positive

goal—the achievement of man's true highest good—by building on the foundation of negative liberty, which aims not at fulfillment but at self-preservation. In its intellectual manifestation, this liberty may first come to sight as a capitulation to the vicious tendency of human beings to wear their opinions on their sleeves, but in so doing it will create a new virtue of self-expression or intellectual self-expansiveness—a virtue which should easily take hold in the popular mind because it will tap into the natural pride which humans have in their capacity to exist and operate as independent, self-absorbed thinkers. By protecting the expression of ordinary citizens, Spinoza suggests, liberal-democracy will also protect the activity of serious thinkers who unfortunately "do not know how to dissemble" (20.5.9). One of the main tasks of the *Treatise*, it therefore appears at this point, is to create a world in which the very idea of esoteric writing is unknown.

But since the *Treatise* is also devoted to ameliorating the socially pernicious consequences of traditional interpretations of Scripture, it would also seem to go without saying that either freedom of speech cannot be granted absolutely, or that this freedom can exist only when thought is carefully controlled. Spinoza acknowledges "that sovereignty can be harmed by words as well as by deed; and so, if it is impossible to take this freedom away from subjects completely, it will on the other hand be very pernicious to grant it altogether" (20.3.3). His main practical task in chapter 20 will therefore be to make clear how far the liberty of expression can "be granted in keeping with the peace of the republic" (20.3.3). He will need to articulate the character of the unofficial homogeneity that will need to underlie liberal society. In chapters 14 and 19 Spinoza had made the limits imposed by piety virtually synonymous with those required by civil

peace, and now, in answer to his own question, he seems to take this secular standard a step further. He writes that the "ultimate aim [*finem . . . ultimum*]" of a republic is "to free each from dread" (20.4.1), and he thus impels the reader to recall his ambiguous statement from the preface that "it is equally impossible to take away superstition from the vulgar as to take away dread" (P.6.1). The ultimate aim of liberal-democracy—which, to be sure, may perhaps only be approached asymptotically—is therefore to produce the drastic weakening of superstition. Since its aim is to ensure the preservation of humans as "rational beings" and to allow them to "use free reason" (20.4.2), it will attempt to reproduce, as far as this is possible on such a grand scale, the atheism of the state of nature. So while Spinoza is therefore attempting to liberate certain sub-philosophic emotions; while he is seeking to cultivate certain sentiments of pride and devotion which can inculcate a deep, spiritual loyalty to a democratic regime; he also intends to ensure that those sentiments revolve around an admiration of reason and that they are thus subsumed, so to speak, under a rationalist umbrella. The open expression of those emotions which are conducive to superstition and therewith to a hostility towards reason, on the contrary, will be unequivocally banned. As Spinoza writes, the only arguments that will be permitted into the public arena will be those which are taught and defended "by reason alone" and not those which are rooted in hatred, anger, ruses, or personal authority (20.4.6).

This limitation would seem to extend even to arguments which are rooted in Spinoza's civic theology from chapters 13 and 14. After all, when he proposed that theology, he also openly proclaimed it to be totally irrational. If the *Treatise* outlines the

steps in a project for the progressive education of society towards something approximating a rationalist outlook, then it seems that what is appropriate for human beings who have followed Spinoza through chapter 14 may not be appropriate for those who have stayed with him until chapter 20. At the conclusion of Spinoza's political project, citizens will think of themselves as rational and as liberated from all intellectual authority: they will believe themselves to be free of all ruses (20.4.2). They will not quite recognize that their allegiance to reason is not quite wholly rational, nor that their beliefs have been decisively shaped by Spinoza or by later thinkers whom he hopes will implement his project of cultural reform. In contrast to what reason actually teaches, according to Spinoza, they will believe that it is rational to obey a law in all cases, even if in so doing one "often has to act against what he judges and openly thinks is good" (20.4.8). They will believe that since reason and self-interest sanction the social contract, these things also call not just for passive obedience, but also for active dedication, on behalf of the liberal state (20.4.10). As he did in chapter 16, Spinoza obscures the tension that a clear-sighted person will recognize whenever the maintenance of the social contract requires real personal sacrifice on the part of an individual. He does not advertise it like he did in chapters 13 through 15.

Because the liberal regime therefore requires a basis in a not entirely rationalist ideology, Spinoza acknowledges that certain ideas which challenge its legitimacy must be subject to censorship. "For example, if someone *thought* that the highest power was not within its right, or that no one had to stand by his promises," such a person would necessarily be seditious precisely on account of the fact "that he *thinks* such a thing"

(20.4.13, emphasis added). There will continue to be thought-crimes even within the most permissive liberal-democracy, although perhaps, if such a republic is correctly established, there will not typically be a need to punish them in the usual way. But this has tremendous implications for the behavior of genuine philosophers. Since reason teaches precisely that the social contract—and all law for that matter—can never be fully rational, it seems that they will still be prohibited from openly expressing their deepest views. Some need for esoteric writing will remain, and the philosophers of the future will have to follow Spinoza's example and claim to be patriotic (cf. P.3.3; 17.5.26; 20.6.4). Moreover, it appears that they will also have to endure a drastic dilution of the popular perception of their own way of life. Because they will have an interest in upholding a regime where the freedom of speech and thought is guaranteed, they will not only have to present themselves as patriotic, but they will also have to endorse liberal-democracy—as Spinoza himself does in chapter 20—from the citizen's point of view. From that point of view, philosophy appears simply as freedom of expression, or as an activity of writing books only "for the learned" (20.6.4). Thus, they will also have to assert that philosophy itself is not necessarily an activity limited to an elite few—for the "learned" in a Spinozistic society will include a relatively large class of intellectuals. As Spinoza writes, "the best republic grants the . . . freedom of philosophizing *to each*" (20.4.15, emphasis added). Philosophy in the future will be seen as something that is available to all those who have the time and the desire to take it up. It will become a term used to denote the activity of scholars and academics, rather than a way of life characteristic only of truly great minds.

Since authentic philosophy, to Spinoza, will come to flourish under a liberal regime only if it does not put itself at the center of political life, this loss of recognition would seem to be a price that it will simply have to endure. But Spinoza is confident that the outlook which he is constructing will not lead to relativism, or to a loss of a consciousness among the citizenry of the possibility of human greatness. As he summarizes it at the end of chapter 20, this outlook is identical with that which he claims to find in the city of Amsterdam, and it is decidedly commercial. In the Dutch Republic, he writes, citizens no longer orient their lives by religious concerns, but they "live with the utmost harmony" because, when deciding whether "to trust their goods to someone, they care to know only whether he is rich or poor and whether he usually acts in good faith or by a ruse" (20.6.4). Money and credit, rather than faith and theology, will provide the social bond under liberal-democracy. At the same time, however, Spinoza seeks to combine these commercial sentiments with a contempt for "the whining vulgar" (20.6.4), "whose highest salvation is contemplating money in the bank and having an overfull stomach" (20.5.2).

Spinoza's commercial society will therefore not attempt to use the law to curtail vice, but it will also seek to preserve the belief that "luxury, envy, greed, drunkenness, and other, similar things" are vices (20.4.18). Public opinion and the mores which govern it will cultivate an admiration for those who look upon the body with contempt—"those whom good education, integrity of morals, and virtue have made freer" (20.5.2). Spinoza even closes chapter 20 with a salute to the beauty and nobility of self-sacrifice. He writes that the most honorable and upright citizens of a liberal regime will be ready

and willing to become martyrs for freedom of speech and thought, and to transform the scaffold—"the intimidator of evil men"—into "a most beautiful theater for showing the highest example of tolerance and virtue. For those who recognize themselves to be honorable do not fear death or beg for mercy," but rather "deem it honorable . . . to die for a good cause and glorious to die for freedom" (20.5.9). A morality of tolerance, according to Spinoza, should not be expected to reduce human aspirations to the lowest common denominator. On the contrary, it will serve not merely as a means that can prevent the adherents of different sects from killing one another, but also as the centerpiece of new moral outlook which can inspire the most awesome examples of patriotic devotion.

But of course, Spinoza's liberal republic will seek to cultivate a willingness among citizens to make such sacrifices in theory so that they will never actually have to do so in practice. In a regime in which freedom of speech and thought is constitutionally protected, there will be no cause for martyrdom and hence also no martyrs. In actual fact, then, Spinoza's liberalism would seem to ensure the disappearance of self-sacrifice—a disappearance which he seems to have sought to bring about through his attempt to bring human beings as close as they can come to the self-interested outlook which is part and parcel with the life of reason. His political project would therefore seem to prepare the way for a view that will look upon self-sacrifice as frankly foolish, or at best, as a relic of the irrational moralities of the past which have since been eclipsed by the more reasonable Enlightenment teaching about self-preservation. But if this suspicion is correct, then this would seem to pose large problems for the potential success of liberal-

democracy as Spinoza understands it. After all, that regime must rest on a successfully established balance of power (or right) between rulers and ruled, something which presupposes the willingness of citizens to endure the costs to life and property that revolution entails. If this latter sentiment fades away, human political and intellectual freedom would seem to find itself under threat—especially in a society where there are no more intermediate powers standing between the government and the people.

CONCLUSION

This last consideration invites a reconsideration of Spinoza's political philosophy, and that of the Enlightenment more generally, in light of the critical reflections on democracy which were recorded by Alexis de Tocqueville. When Spinoza and Locke wrote, liberalism was a project that was still confined to the realm of theory. Tocqueville was one of the first great philosophers to observe it in practice. The United States which he visited in the 1830s was a country whose moral and religious outlook had a great deal in common with that proposed by Locke, and, according to Tocqueville, it also contained the latent seeds of the more far-reaching, radically individualistic, and thoroughly self-absorbed and self-interested moral orientation which Spinoza sought to propagate. Those Spinozistic tendencies, in his analysis, are not peculiarly American but rather distinctly democratic, and they have the potential to produce a lethargic and apathetic citizenry which, in turn, may one day voluntarily submit to a new kind of despotism—a despotism

that does not oppress men materially but rather degrades them intellectually and spiritually.

Indeed, perhaps the most alarming part of Tocqueville's analysis, especially to contemporary ears, is the scant ability to prevent such evils which he attributed to America's Constitutional protections for the freedom of thought and speech. Liberalism in the United States, he wrote, not only produces few great works of the intellect, but it also seems to be uniquely threatening to the idea of human greatness itself. Conceived solely on Spinoza's own terms, this seems to be something of a problem. For while Spinoza grants to his citizens a nearly absolute liberty of thought and expression, he also seeks to preserve that liberty by bestowing a tremendous amount of power on public opinion. Moreover, although he implies that the greatest philosophers, whom he expects liberalism to produce, will still need to disguise their teachings somewhat in order to avoid destabilizing society, he also seems to encourage the development of an intellectual atmosphere in which the possibility of esoteric writing will not be taken seriously.[132] Especially when the history of liberalism since Spinoza is taken into account, it would seem reasonable to ask whether the belief in intellectual equality which he sought to cultivate—as found, say, in his deliberate watering-down of the meaning of philosophy—will not in fact serve to undermine the popular belief in the very existence of intellectual excellence. One thing which Tocqueville takes quite seriously, but which Spinoza seems not to give much weight to, is the possibility that the advent of human equality might pose an extreme danger to man's spiritual life, and thus also to his political freedom.

Perhaps the most important reason to turn to Tocqueville, however, has to do with his contrasting, and highly un-Spinozistic view of human psychology and the origins of religious belief. If it is true, as this chapter has tried to suggest, that Spinoza's *Treatise* contains a theoretical as well as a political project, and if it is also true that that project consists in an attempt to weaken orthodox religiosity by helping society move from an outlook of devotion and admiration to one which approximates the philosopher's outlook of reason and self interest, then the proof of that project can be ascertained solely through an analysis of its political results. *Democracy in America* is a book which is largely devoted to an analysis of those results, and, if Tocqueville is to be believed, they are far from conclusive. Indeed, as we will see in the next chapter, Tocqueville found the impulse toward devotion and self-sacrifice to be very much present in the United States, in spite of the apparent best efforts of democracy and modernity to stamp it out. Indeed, from his observations of America, he came to the conclusion that the impulse to self-sacrifice is an ineradicable part of the human soul, and that, as a consequence, many of the contradictions and pathologies which plague modern democratic life can be attributed to liberalism's failure to carve out a place for this desire. Since that desire, to Tocqueville, is inextricably linked with the longing for another world, his liberalism, unlike Enlightenment liberalism, will seek to lay a firm foundation for religious toleration without sacrificing the tremendous benefits which, in his analysis, can be gained from what remains of orthodox religious belief.

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[132] Bagley, for instance, writes that "It could be suggested that one casualty of the Enlightenment was a serious regard for the 'art of reading.'" (Bagley 1998, 126 n.7).

Chapter 5: Tocqueville's Post-Enlightenment Liberalism

"Only by a kind of aberration of the intellect and with the aid of a sort of moral violence exercised on their own nature do men stray from religious beliefs; an invincible inclination leads them back to them. Disbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 284

"Today religion is passing away."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 89

Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* is devoted to a theoretical critique of modernity which is derived from an observation of modern political practice. It was "during my stay in the United States," the author informs us, and presumably not before that, that his eyes were drawn to certain "new objects" (3)[133] which were present in America and which he then began to notice emerging in his native Europe. The spectacle of America convinced Tocqueville that political life in the West had changed fundamentally and in an unprecedented way, and it was not by accident that he also observed that that country was also the one in which the Enlightenment's political project had been most obviously put into practice.[134] America, he claims, exhibits the "extreme limits" not simply of democracy, but of "the same democracy" which is "advancing rapidly toward power in Europe." "A great democratic revolution is taking place among us" (3), he famously declares, and for Tocqueville's French contemporaries (who "all

[133] Unless otherwise noted all parenthetical references in this chapter come from the Mansfield and Winthrop translation of *Democracy in America* (Tocqueville 2000). On a few occasions, such as when dealing with Tocqueville's loose French translations of American colonial documents in I.1.2 (for which Mansfield and Winthrop supply only the English originals), I have had recourse to the Schleifer translation in the recently issued bilingual Liberty Fund historical-critical edition (Tocqueville 2010). All references to the French text come from that edition as well, and all usages of its translation have been noted in the text.

see" this revolution but "do not judge it in the same manner" [3]) these words could only be taken to refer to one thing: the continuing legacy of 1789, as manifest above all in the overthrow of feudal aristocracy, a regime which was founded on the intimate political alliance between the monarchy and the Church.

Resting as it did on a claim about the divine right of kings, the *Ancien Régime* constituted the peak of theocratic politics according to Spinoza. The destruction of this regime was therefore the chief political aim of his radical version of the Enlightenment project,[135] and, albeit with varying degrees of salutary modification, it was precisely the results of that project which Tocqueville discovered on display in the United States. America, to Tocqueville, thus reveals what political life will look like after the overthrow of the alliance between monarchy and Christianity has reached its logical completion, or rather, since Tocqueville denies that America ever had a revolution (12), it reveals what it would have looked like if that alliance had never existed in the first place. Tocqueville's description of the United States therefore presents "an image of democracy itself" (13) because it articulates the nature of a political order which is decisively shaped by the insights of modern rationalism. As Tocqueville describes it in *Democracy in America*, that order is marked by the successful attempt to weaken orthodox or Biblical Christianity, to undermine religiously-based law, and to place moral and political authority instead in the independent reason of individuals and in a state which, as the

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[134] Tocqueville makes this latter observation especially in II.1.1-2.

[135] Israel draws a straight line of influence from the thought of Spinoza to that of Rousseau, Diderot, and the Jacobins (Israel 2001, 704-720), and he credits the anti-Christian and anti-monarchical ideas of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*—as diffused through more popular media—with creating "a revolution of the

artificial creation of such individuals, is understood to be the embodiment of their collective reason.[136]

To Tocqueville, however, the triumph of this new understanding of politics also signals the possibility of a set of hitherto unknown political dangers. Whereas Spinoza had argued for democracy in order to ensure the protection of individual freedom, Tocqueville observes that "the generative fact" of modern political life is not liberty but "equality of conditions" (3). Liberalism and democracy, he suggests, do not necessarily accompany one another, and when they do it is the latter (understood not as a form of government but as an egalitarian "social state") which is stronger and more fundamental than the former.[137] By in effect throwing each individual back on the authority of his own reason, modern democracy, according to Tocqueville, not only removes all obstacles which can thwart the will of the modern state, but, as the quotations provided at the opening of this chapter would seem to indicate, it also does "a sort of moral violence" to the human soul. As this chapter will attempt to show, Tocqueville's main criticism of the modern Enlightenment project is that it rested on a flawed view of human psychology—a view which failed to acknowledge what Tocqueville considers to be man's natural

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mind" that made the events of 1789 possible (p. 714). For the particularly strong influence which Spinozism enjoyed in France, see esp. pp. 565-98.

[136] One of Tocqueville's most famous claims is that the majority in the United States is omnipotent: "The people reign over the American political world as does God over the universe" (55). The reason why the democratic legislature enjoys unlimited power, however, comes from the fact that the authority of the majority which it represents is both "material and moral" (243), and its moral authority is absolute because the majority "claims to be the unique organ of reason" (84).

[137] The essence of this Tocquevillian observation is well summarized by Manent, who writes that "In the formulation 'liberty is equal for all,' which essentially distills the definition of democratic liberty, the predicate is *stronger* than the noun. The extension of liberty to all members of the social body changes its meaning. The center of gravity of the social mechanism tips to the side of equality. To affirm the equal liberty of all citizens amounts to affirming equality first" (Manent 1996, 23, emphasis original).

longing for immortality. That longing, according to Tocqueville, always takes the form of a paradoxical desire to affirm oneself by simultaneously sacrificing oneself, and it is not only the key element in the origins of religious belief—which means that religion is much more deeply ingrained among human beings than Spinoza acknowledges—but it also appears to be the foundation of all politics which can be said to be deserving of the name.

By denying the existence of this longing, and by constructing a new order based on the supposition that human beings are fundamentally this-worldly, self-regarding, and apolitical, the modern project in Tocqueville's estimation threatens to bring about the destruction of politics and the advent of a new condition of social isolation which he terms "individualism." The 'effectual truth' of the Enlightenment can be seen in the creation of a society in which human beings are cut off from one another and have no sense of membership in or duty to a larger whole.[138] Such a condition, Tocqueville suggests, does violence to human nature because it suffocates our natural desire to carry out duties to such a whole. It makes man into a purely self-interested being, a rational calculator who lacks distinctly human tensions or contradictions, a being who possesses neither a sense of greatness nor of self-contempt, but who has become merely a seeker after material well-being or "comfortable self-preservation." But as Tocqueville warns, such an end does not require freedom. Indeed, material comfort may in fact be more

[138] Manent suggests that, according to Tocqueville, democracy tends to reproduce the state of nature within society (Manent 1996, 12, 26-8). Winthrop writes that Tocqueville's Americans must be told how they would benefit from social cooperation upon each instance when it is required of them. Radicalizing the teaching of the social contract theorists, who had made the break with the state of nature definitive, the Americans in effect depart from and return to it "on each and every occasion of social activity" (Winthrop 1991, 401). See also Winthrop 1993, 210 and Mansfield and Winthrop 2006, 99.

easily be provided by a new kind of despotism—a despotism which will rob men of their humanity precisely by caring for them and which will thus degrade them "without tormenting them" (662).

Although this critical description of modernity, centering as it does on the place given to material comforts, would at first glance seem more Lockean than Spinozistic, Tocqueville associates the ultimate tendencies of democracy with Spinoza's more radical philosophic project. He insists that men living under democracy will ultimately be drawn to philosophic doctrines which deny freedom of the will and the importance of the individual, and they will especially be led to embrace pantheism, which, as he presents it, seems to be but a stop on the road to outright materialism. Unlike Spinoza, who claimed that the popular acceptance of at least the first two of these would lead to a flourishing of the *summum bonum*, Tocqueville suggests that, precisely because of the attractiveness of such doctrines, there are few societies more threatening to both civic and intellectual virtue than liberal-democracy. To Tocqueville, Spinozism is most representative of those pernicious intellectual trends that promise eventually to favor despotism by dimming passions and shrinking souls. By contrast, he discovers what he calls "human greatness [*grandeur*]" in precisely those medieval aristocracies which Spinoza wrote the *Theologico-Political Treatise* in an effort to destroy. For while these societies rested on a conventional inequality which Tocqueville acknowledges to be unjust, they also gave birth to those beautiful but tension-ridden desires which, in his analysis, made possible not only civic virtue but also genuine freedom of the mind. While acknowledging the need to accept democracy as a "*fait accompli*" (13), then, and even as one which has a

great deal of moral force on its side, Tocqueville suggests that the key political problem of our time consists in the need to find a way to re-instill within its fold those simultaneously self-affirming and self-despising longings which were in fact most characteristic of aristocracy. It is precisely for this task, this chapter will argue, that a "new political science is needed for a world altogether new" (7).[139]

THE "GREAT DEMOCRATIC REVOLUTION"

Of course, the suggestion that Tocqueville viewed democracy as a product of the Enlightenment appears to run counter to the picture of its origins which he presents in his

[139] By emphasizing the critical side of Tocqueville's attitude toward democracy, this chapter will attempt to challenge the interpretations of those scholars who have tended to regard him as working within the modern tradition. These authors have tended in particular to emphasize his professed intellectual debts to either Montesquieu or to Rousseau, two of the three authors with whom he claimed to "live a little every day" (Tocqueville to Kergorlay, November 12 1836; quoted in Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xxx). Zetterbaum, for example, finds support in Tocqueville for Montesquieu's teaching about the 'spirit of commerce,' (1967, 132-7) and he accordingly claims that Tocqueville exhibits a "fundamental agreement with the presuppositions of modern political thought; despite apparent departures, he follows in the tradition originating with Machiavelli" and he continues "the natural-rights teaching of Hobbes" (pp. 104-5). In a somewhat similar fashion, Koritansky (1986) regards Tocqueville as a Rousseauian through and through, and he interprets *Democracy in America* simply as an application of the teachings of the *Emile* and the *Social Contract*. While Tocqueville therefore does appear as a critic of bourgeois modernity in Koritansky's account, the criticism which he is said to present is by no means original with him—Koritansky's Tocqueville follows Rousseau in radicalizing modernity even while attacking it. One of the best succinct statements of Tocqueville's debt to Rousseau, and of the political reasons that caused him not to stress that debt, can be found in Bloom (1990, 312-13), who concludes that although Tocqueville is not "simply the same as Rousseau, . . . the difficulty is more on the side of differentiating them than of assimilating them" (p. 313). While a full analysis of the influence of Montesquieu and Rousseau on Tocqueville would require a thematic examination of their writings—something which is obviously impossible in the current context—by making clear the central place which the longing for immortality holds in Tocqueville's psychology, I hope to indicate his fundamental disagreement with both the thought of the Enlightenment and with Rousseau's critique of it. Lawler (1993) has argued that while Tocqueville agreed with Rousseau's psychological insights in important respects, he could not accept his apparent solution to the problem posed by our mortality—the reverie, which Lawler interprets as a form of escapism (pp. 6-7, 47-8). Instead, even while considering him to be an unbeliever, Lawler claims that Tocqueville was nonetheless indebted for his understanding of human psychology to the third author with whom he claimed to live every day, namely Pascal. In what follows, my interpretation of Tocqueville will be closer to that of Lawler than those of Zetterbaum and Koritansky, but at the end of this chapter I will attempt to point out what I consider to be a set of fundamental and irreconcilable differences between his thought and that of Pascal.

introduction. There he describes it not as a sudden revolution but as a gradual and centuries-old process of societal transformation—a process which was not only not caused by human efforts, but which in fact served to illustrate the seeming irrelevance of all human agency. As he writes, both democracy's advocates and its opponents worked for its establishment despite themselves and "without knowing it, as blind instruments in the hands of God" (6). Seventeen years after he completed the first volume of *Democracy in America*, however, Tocqueville apparently came to accept a very different picture. In an address which he delivered to the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences in 1852, he argued that the French Revolution was caused not by social and economic forces but by a small group of renowned authors. It was "political science," he claimed, which produced the "greatest event in history," and thus it will always be, for in every society it is the political sciences which produce "a sort of intellectual atmosphere where the spirit of the governed and the governments breathe" (Tocqueville 1951- , 16:233, my translation). On the opening pages of *Democracy in America*, by contrast, Tocqueville makes no explicit mention of the thought of the Enlightenment and none whatsoever of 1789. Indeed, throughout the work he presents himself not as a political scientist but as a kind of sociologist, giving scant importance to great men or great events, and describing important political outcomes as rooted in allegedly more fundamental and longer-lasting sub-political causes.[140]

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[140] This has understandably earned Tocqueville praise from sociologists (e.g. Aron 1965, 181-231) and occasional criticism from political scientists. West (1991), for example, harshly criticizes Tocqueville for allegedly neglecting the controlling power of law and for regarding the political as a mere reflection of the sub-political. A similar criticism is found in Anastaplo (1991, 459). For a more nuanced account of what Tocqueville means by the "social state," and of the theoretical and political considerations that caused him to introduce this important category, see M. Zuckert 1993 together with Lively 1962, 42-4 and 238. Both

Did Tocqueville, then, simply undergo a change of mind about this fundamental question at some point between 1835 and 1852? Before hastily leaping to such a conclusion, it will be helpful to consider whether the account of the origins of democracy which he provides in the introduction may be more easily understood if it is read while keeping in mind the political situation of Tocqueville's European audience. As he notes on the work's very first page, French politics in the early to mid 19th century is marked by a fundamental division over the character of democracy (understood in Tocqueville's sense of equality of conditions). "Some consider it a new thing, and taking it for an accident, they still hope to be able to stop it; whereas others judge it irresistible because to them it seems the most continuous, the oldest, and the most permanent fact known in history" (3). These two parties, whom we might call reactionaries and progressives, appear to be manifestations of the two "great parties" whose opinions, according to Tocqueville, are "as old as the world" and present, at least to some extent, "in all free societies." One of these parties seeks to restrict popular power, while the other seeks to extend it (167, 170). And yet, while this would seem to suggest that aristocracy and democracy are at least in some sense permanent features of all political life, in the introduction Tocqueville gives the powerful impression that they are instead two

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authors emphasize the complexity that lies behind Tocqueville's apparent status as a sociologist and the connections between that self-presentation and the expectations of his democratic audience. In a similar fashion, Ceaser (1990, 69) argues that Tocqueville's refusal to entertain the possibility of establishing regimes other than democracy in modern times arises from his astute observation of the limits provided by the historical circumstances in which he wrote. Zetterbaum claims that Tocqueville followed Montesquieu in returning to a "classical" mode of analysis, and he equates what Tocqueville calls the "social state" with what the ancients called the "regime" (1967, 52). This latter position has also been forcefully argued by Ceaser (ibid.) and by Manent (2006, 115, 118-9), who claims that Tocqueville's study of democratic political life permitted him "to rediscover the most fundamental intuition of Plato and Aristotle, . . . namely, that there exists a close correspondence between the order of the city and the order of the soul."

successive phases in history. But his argument that these two social states are rooted not in nature but in history is far from convincing.[141] Faced with the need to address one party which thinks democracy entirely novel and another which thinks it eternal, Tocqueville's somewhat humorous response is in effect to split the difference. He claims that democracy is neither new nor eternal but instead that it is approximately seven hundred years old (3-4).

His account of the gradual and allegedly inevitable (and providential) march of equality therefore begins around the year 1135, when France is "divided among a few families who possess the land and govern the inhabitants." Of course, looking back seven hundred years from that point, one would quite likely consider oneself to be living at the apex of a historical process marked by the gradual and progressive development of *inequality* (cf. 383-4, 420-1). Europe in the eleventh and twelfth centuries presents the spectacle of pure aristocracy unmixed with any democratic element: a savage, brutal, warrior society in which rule is founded only in compulsion. At that time, the "right of command passes from generation to generation by inheritance; men have only one means of acting upon one another—by force; only one origin of power is to be discovered—landed wealth" (4). If the extreme of democracy is a soft-despotism (as Tocqueville will

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Because of this, Manent concludes, Tocqueville "is a full-fledged if unintentional member of the school of political philosophy founded in Athenian democracy" (115).

[141] Tocqueville's speech to the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences is also noteworthy for its emphatic rejection of historicism in favor of a political science "founded on the nature . . . of man" and on his "instincts which change their object according to the times, without changing their nature, and which are as immortal as his race" (Tocqueville 1951- , 16:230, my translation). For Tocqueville's hostility to Hegel and to German philosophies of history, see Kessler 1994, 61; Koritansky 1986, 13-14; Lively 1962, 34-5; and Zetterbaum 1967, 18. Tocqueville's professed opposition "to the Hegelian identification of what is with what is right" (Zetterbaum 1967, 18) could of course also apply to Spinoza's identification of right

argue in Volume II), it would therefore appear that the extreme of aristocracy is a despotism of the more traditional sort—a state of unmitigated barbarism which is on that account devoid of art, leisure, philosophy, or any kind of cultural and intellectual life.

"But then the power of the clergy comes to be founded and soon spreads" (4). As Tocqueville presents it, it was the political power of Christianity—the advent of a rival to civil authority, which Spinoza denounces in chapter 19 of the *Treatise*—that simultaneously founded both democracy and civilization in Europe. Thanks to the church, "he who would have vegetated as a serf in eternal slavery" could now take a "place as a priest in the midst of nobles" and would "*often* take a seat above kings" (4, emphasis added). Now, this characterization of the medieval church as a force for equality is a drastic overstatement, but it allows Tocqueville to accomplish several important ends. Rhetorically, the claim that democracy is distinctly Christian—and that it is taking place among "Christian peoples" or in the "Christian universe" (6-7)—helps to further the idea that it is providential. If it can be established that democracy is rooted in the Church, then Tocqueville may be able to persuade orthodox reactionaries to stop resisting it and instead to join him in helping to direct it.[142] At the same time, however,

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with power in chapter 16 of the *Treatise*. See Tocqueville's letter to Corcelle of July 22, 1854 (Tocqueville 1861, 2:270-1).

[142] Not surprisingly, how scholars view the seriousness or lack thereof of Tocqueville's 'providential thesis' tends to reflect what they think about his religious beliefs. Lively (1962, 40-1), Kessler (1994, 52-4), and Zetterbaum (1967, 1-16, 19-21), who regard Tocqueville simply as a "religious functionalist," consider his claims about equality's divine character as crafted to meet the rhetorical requirements posed by his political situation. In support of this view, Zetterbaum convincingly cites the following passage from a letter which Tocqueville wrote to Eugène Stoffels a month after the publication of Volume I: "I tried to diminish the ardor of [the Republican party], and without discouraging them, to show them the only road to take. I attempted to diminish the terrors of [the aristocrats], *and to bend their will to the idea of an inevitable future* in such a way that the one being less impetuous, and the others offering less resistance, society could advance more perfectly toward the necessary realization of its destiny. Here is the master idea of the work" (Quoted in Zetterbaum 1967, 21, Zetterbaum's emphasis). Of course, that the realization

Tocqueville's presentation at this point also seems to indicate that equality is neither divine nor eternal. It had a founding, and that founding consisted not in the *divine* revelation of Christianity but in the establishment of the Church as a human authority. Here as elsewhere, Tocqueville analyses religion "from a purely human point of view" (284, 419), and that point of view indicates that the power of the clergy was a force for civilization because it introduced a standard higher than brute force which began to erode, but in so doing refined and softened, the rule of Europe's warrior-aristocracy.

While the Church was therefore in one sense a force for democracy, its establishment also signaled the peak of aristocracy—a peak which was not synonymous with its extreme, but which was achieved only after the establishment of a healthy tension within society between competing democratic and aristocratic elements. The Church exercised a power over kings because kings became believers. As social relations became "complicated and numerous" the idea of civil law was born and monarchs, clothed in "ermine" as well as "mail" (4), ceased to base their rule on brute force but instead claimed the authority of right. Those who were designated as 'nobles' according to their social rank also claimed the right to hold that rank because they believed themselves to be noble in truth. And the conception of nobility to which they appealed, as Tocqueville describes it, always involved an element of selflessness. In the eulogy of aristocracy which he provides in the introduction, Tocqueville makes clear that that

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of "destiny" requires the bending of wills would seem to call into question whether—or to what degree—that destiny is really "necessary" in the first place. See also Ceaser 1991, 300-1. For a more pious and therefore egalitarian view of Tocqueville's thought, see Mitchell 1995, who tries to place *Democracy in America* within the tradition of Augustinian, Catholic Christianity. As the next few paragraphs and this chapter as a whole should make clear, my analysis disagrees as much with this view as with Zetterbaum's

regime, at its best, represented a certain ideal of human behavior—a code of mutual generosity and reciprocal devotion that "could have been established" between the various unequal classes (8). Although this society surely contained numerous "miseries," in the midst of those miseries human beings "enjoyed several kinds of happiness one can conceive and appreciate only with difficulty in our day" (8). Our day, as Tocqueville will later make clear, is excessively self-interested and materialistic. "The taste for well-being forms the salient and indelible feature of democratic ages" (422), and so those things which it is now difficult to appreciate would appear to be precisely those immaterial goods which are found only where there exists a conception of virtue that demands the overcoming of what is conducive to one's happiness in the most ordinary sense of the term. Because kings were so far above the people, they felt themselves "vested in the eyes of the crowd with an almost divine character," but this led them to draw "from the very respect they generated the will not to abuse their power" (8). Similarly, on the other side, the people too considered the rule of the nobility to be divine, and their obedience elevated rather than debased them precisely because they considered the sacrifices demanded of them to be legitimate (8).

As Tocqueville will later note, "the official doctrine" of aristocratic times in matters of morality held "that it is glorious to forget oneself and that it is fitting to do good without self-interest like God himself" (500). Now of course, one can ask whether this moral outlook may not contain a certain tension, for if such an action is carried out for the sake of glory then it is arguably not so simply disinterested. But Tocqueville's

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contention that Tocqueville continued the legacy of Hobbes. For the differences between Tocqueville's

suggestion, both in the introduction and throughout the work, is that this potentially paradoxical sentiment produced something truly grand. Among the aristocracy, it permitted the achievement of immaterial goods—"pursuits of luxury, refinements of taste, pleasures of the mind, and cultivation of the arts"—and even among the people the instinct for self-forgetting produced "generous sentiments, profound beliefs, and savage virtues" (8). Constituted around such an ethic, "the social body could have stability, power, and above all, glory" (8). This glory may well have been founded on a confused sentiment, but that does not make it mere vainglory according to Tocqueville. On the contrary, the tension within it appears to be at the root of something truly lofty of which Christianity, by promising salvation in return for self-forgetting, provided perhaps the clearest manifestation (504-5). By inculcating this ethic, it seems, the rise of the Church produced these refined sentiments and decisively undermined the warrior-barons' monopoly on power. Because the latter's claim to rule by divine right was a claim of nobility, it also entailed the willingness to make a very real sacrifice—and this sacrifice would eventually be exacted when the aristocracy chose to display its virtue by not acting in its own interest, which in turn led it to loosen its grip on the social body.

Unlike Spinoza, who tends to regard politicized religion under aristocracy at best as a means of population control and at worst as a form of insanity, Tocqueville's assessment of it appears to be somewhat more complicated. As he presents it, the flowering of medieval Christianity simultaneously constituted both the peak of aristocracy and the beginning of its eventual decline. This is because the immaterial

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theology and that of St. Augustine, see Kessler 1994, 53-4.

goods whose achievement it made possible broadened human horizons and instilled a concept of the universal. "Poetry, eloquence, memory, the graces of the mind, the fires of the imagination, depth of thought, all the gifts that Heaven distributed haphazardly, profited democracy, and even if they were found in the possession of its adversaries, they still served its cause by putting into relief the natural greatness of man" (5). Since the official moral doctrine of aristocratic times was a universalistic ideal, it also revealed aristocratic conventions for what they were. It permitted one to measure conventional greatness according to a newly discovered standard of natural greatness. In so doing, it made clear that those who were noble in rank were not necessarily noble in soul, that human greatness is neither due to birth nor inherited like land, and that, because it is rare and haphazard, its distribution is in a sense democratic. Aristocratic morality thus consequently and naturally led to calls (like that issued by Spinoza) for the destruction of the conventional aristocracy in the name of the natural aristocracy, and it was hoped that political democracy would allow the latter to come to the fore.[143] Democracy's conquests "therefore spread with those of civilization and enlightenment, and literature was an arsenal open to all, from which the weak and the poor came each day to seek arms" (5).

This mention of enlightenment therefore appears to be a quiet allusion to *the* Enlightenment. Tocqueville's claim that science became "a seed of power put within the

[143] One example of such a call is found in Thomas Jefferson's letter to John Adams of October 28, 1813. Jefferson claims that "there is a natural aristocracy among men" whose grounds are "virtue and talents." Like Tocqueville, he credits the progress of technology—and especially the invention of gunpowder—with toppling the rule of those who are endowed only with "bodily strength," and he confidently predicts that the best way to bring about the rule of the natural aristocracy "is exactly that provided by all our constitutions, to leave the citizens the free election and separation of the aristoi from the pseudo-aristoi, of the wheat from the chaff. In general they will elect the real good and wise. In some instances, wealth may corrupt, and birth blind them; but not in sufficient degree to endanger the society" (Jefferson 1984, 1305-6).

reach of the people" recalls the goal of that project to use knowledge to aid the weak and the poor and to conquer nature for the relief of man's estate.[144] The development of technology (such as firearms and the printing press), together with the advent of commerce and "transferable wealth" (5) served to equalize conditions both materially and intellectually. The rise of the middle class was therefore coeval with the development of Protestantism, which democratized human greatness by teaching that all "are equally in a state to find the path to Heaven" (6). But although Protestantism gave all the right to read the Bible for themselves, in so doing, as Tocqueville will later make clear, it also paved the way for a more general extension of moral and intellectual authority to the individual, which led in turn to a more thoroughgoing skepticism among the likes of Descartes and Voltaire (404-5). And it is precisely here, according to Tocqueville, that can be glimpsed a new set of dangers unforeseen by the more hopeful originators of the Enlightenment project. Tocqueville's sole mention of the "natural aristocracy" in *Democracy in America* concerns the danger which equality poses to it. On the American frontier, where "one can observe democracy reaching its furthest limit," human beings are so isolated that they "hardly know one another," and they escape "not only the influence of great names and great wealth, but of that natural aristocracy that flows from enlightenment and virtue" (50). When democracy is left to itself, it produces what Pierre Manent has aptly termed a "dis-society" (1996, 12, 142)—a state in which individuals are isolated from one another not only physically, but also intellectually and spiritually. Rather than permitting the cultivation of the most outstanding human beings, such a condition will in

[144] This suggestion is made by Hancock (1991, 375-6). The phrase "the relief of man's estate," of course,

fact smother them, so to speak, in the cradle, because it will extinguish the sense of nobility and of duty to others which is at the root of all human greatness.

Under aristocracy, Tocqueville writes, there was much misery, "but souls were not degraded" (8). Democracy, by contrast, if it is not somehow mitigated, seems destined to bring about this result. The grave threat which it poses to "the natural greatness of man" is what produces "a sort of religious terror" in Tocqueville's own soul (6). As a partisan of human greatness, he fears for the future of the soul itself. His "new political science" (7) will therefore seek to preserve the soul, to the extent that that is possible in the era of democracy,[145] and to do this it will need to combat the most extreme tendencies of the Enlightenment while also recognizing that the latter has shaped the world in a way that cannot be simply reversed. In order to persuade the "most powerful, most intelligent, and most moral classes" to take hold of democracy "so as to direct it" (7), he will need to convince reactionaries that it cannot be overthrown and progressives that it is not something to be blindly embraced. He thus famously claims that the inevitable development of equality is "a providential fact" (6), but to prove this claim he articulates a mixture of Biblical and Enlightenment theology. For those orthodox Christians who remain loyal to the Old Regime, Tocqueville links democracy with the Church and refers to it as a phenomenon that is occurring "among Christians" (6). Invoking his own experience of "religious terror," he momentarily speaks the language of Old Testament piety, and he claims that the coming of equality has "the sacred character

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comes from Francis Bacon's *The Advancement of Learning*.

[145] For the distinctiveness of Tocqueville's concern with the soul, see Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xviii, and 2006, 84 and context.

of the sovereign master's will" (7)—a will which will eventually vindicate "his justice" even if we cannot understand how or why this could be the case (12).[146] But Tocqueville's argument for democracy's providential character makes no claim to prophetic insight. Here again he measures the divine from a human perspective, and he extends the natural theology which the Enlightenment made popular to a teaching about history. "It is not necessary that God himself speak in order for us to discover sure signs of his will; it suffices to examine the usual course of nature and the continuous tendency of events; I know without the Creator's raising his voice that the stars follow the arcs in space that his finger has traced" (7).

To speak to one audience which is sympathetic to the Enlightenment and another which is hostile to it, Tocqueville claims that democracy is inevitable, but also that it can be restrained, at least to a certain extent. He suggests that it is sanctioned by Nature's God, but also that that God, like the Biblical God, permits and even demands human action for the sake of righteousness (understood as the need to preserve man's aristocratic dignity). The Creator has surely not "made man so as to leave him to debate endlessly in the midst of the intellectual miseries that surround us." "God prepares a firmer and calmer future for European societies" (12), but that future (and thus also "his justice") depends on the inhabitants of those societies: "their fate is in their hands, but soon it will escape them" (7). Democracy is like a raging river; it cannot be stopped or reversed, but it could perhaps be directed—to the extent that nature will allow—through human artifice

[146] Zetterbaum notes that Tocqueville never refers to the wisdom or goodness of providence in the introduction. Yet, preserving Tocqueville's own ambiguity, Zetterbaum also attributes to him a more or

(7). Tocqueville will later assert that men living under democracies tend to think in terms of grand, impersonal causes and to deny the importance of human agency. Democratic historians emphasize the role of large-scale societal developments—they subject human beings "either to an inflexible providence or to a sort of blind fatality" (471)—and the French in particular are obsessed with general ideas which deny the importance of the individual.[147] Tocqueville's providential thesis therefore seems to be crafted largely with such readers in mind: it attempts to convince them that democracy can be altered by first conceding to them that it cannot be stopped. But Tocqueville will also later point out that the democratic understanding of history contains a great deal of truth—at least when one is speaking about democratic times. Modern historians tend to emphasize social causes over individual influences because such influences really are weaker today than they were in the past (470). Thus, Tocqueville's understanding of the "great democratic revolution" would seem to be that it is not truly a product of history. It had a human "founding" (which Tocqueville credited to the Church, but which might just as plausibly be attributed to the Enlightenment and to the way that was prepared for it by the Reformation), and while it could possibly have been undone at that moment, it is now too firmly established for we who are born into it today to roll it back. But it is not so fully

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less unqualified acceptance of democracy's *justice*, as distinct from its *goodness* (see Zetterbaum 1967, 7, in the context of his first chapter as a whole).

[147] "Each morning on awakening I learn that someone has just discovered some general and eternal law that I had never heard spoken of until then. There is no writer so mediocre that it is enough for him to discover truths applicable to a great realm in his first attempt, and who does not remain discontented with himself if he has been unable to enclose the human race in the subject of his discourse" (412). Cf. also Tocqueville's comments at the close of the work, denouncing the tendency of his contemporaries to subject human beings to "previous events, the race, the soil, or the climate" (676).

mature that it cannot be directed by human means.[148] The democratic historian's understanding of the world is not entirely true, but it may yet become so, and when that happens human greatness will be eradicated—if not forever, then at least for the next epoch.[149]

THE "NEW POLITICAL SCIENCE"

Whereas democracy threatens human greatness, the chief advantage of aristocracy, at least according to Tocqueville's initial description of it, was that it tended to foster a kind of human being who personified an ideal of virtue. By commanding self-overcoming and a contempt for material pleasures, aristocracy's public endorsement of this ideal ennobled souls because it sanctioned voluntary obedience. "It is not the use of power or the habit of obedience that depraves men," Tocqueville writes, "but the use of power that they consider illegitimate, and obedience to a power they regard as usurped and oppressive" (8). But by eradicating all legitimate hierarchies—and here one is reminded of Spinoza's teaching that a truly free person will never obey—democracy destroys any notion that actions which are not in one's immediate self-interest can be voluntary and thus also just. According to the modern notion of liberty, "obedience has lost its moral character and there is no longer anything that separates the manly and proud

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[148] Lively (1962, 33-41) faults Tocqueville for not undertaking a metaphysical examination of the philosophical question of free will. But Tocqueville's intention appears to be to analyze the world as it is given to us, and the conclusions about personal agency with which he opens and closes his work—that human choice exists, but only in limited ways—appear to reflect this.

[149] On the potential for democratic intellectual trends to produce their own 'effectual truth,' see Lawler 1991, 101 and context.

virtues of the citizen from the lowly self-indulgence of the slave" (quoted in Manent 1996, 19).[150] Consequently, since the advent of democracy the "prestige of royal power has vanished without being replaced by the majesty of the laws; in our day the people scorn authority, but they fear it, and fear extracts more from them than was formerly given out of respect and love" (9). With no conception of willful self-overcoming, the only possible authority becomes that of fear and force. Thus, albeit with several notable modifications, democracy threatens to bring about a return to the kind of government that existed under the feudal barons. Indeed, just as the latter came to an end with the strengthening of Christianity as a political force, Tocqueville will suggest throughout the book that the maintenance of freedom under democracy requires the preservation of religion—which he famously calls the first of America's political institutions (280).

As he will indicate more clearly later on, Tocqueville at times presents the idea of freedom and of rights as aristocratic rather than democratic. Freedom, he suggests, is the capacity for moral excellence or virtue that is exhibited in one's capacity for self-overcoming. "The idea of rights is nothing other than the idea of virtue introduced into

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[150] This quotation comes from an article Tocqueville wrote in the *London and Westminster Review* in 1836. Because it occurs as a part of his definition of the modern, negative idea of liberty—which he also calls the only "correct" or "just" ("*juste*") idea of liberty—most Tocqueville scholars attribute to him a simple approval of the idea that such obedience is immoral. As Tocqueville makes clear in the introduction, however, and as Manent points out, it is not simply enough to leave things at this, because "the democratic idea, as correct as it is, tends to produce a precarious and menacing situation . . . A correct idea of liberty tends to bring about bad consequences; a false [positive and aristocratic] idea of liberty tends to bring about good consequences. Such is the paradox that Tocqueville presents us" (Manent 1996, 19; see also Lively 1962, 221-2 with Kessler 1994, 34 and Zetterbaum 1967, 28). As will be made clear at greater length below, Tocqueville always presents the idea of liberty under democracy as a *problem*—the paradox which Manent draws our attention to poses the key dilemma to which his theoretical enterprise attempts to respond. But as a political scientist who inhabits a position above the partisan fray (15), it is not altogether clear whether Tocqueville ever does—or even if he can—provide a fully satisfactory *solution* to it. By calling attention to Tocqueville's extended meditation on this problem, this interpretation will attempt to

the political world." It is what allows man to "show himself independent without arrogance and submissive without baseness" (227). Thus, although the theorists of the Enlightenment sought to inculcate a democratic and egalitarian notion of rights, Tocqueville jarringly declares that that teaching did not and indeed could not take hold: today, he writes, "the idea of rights does not exist" (10).[151] To recover it, it appears, it will be necessary to re-introduce some aristocratic elements within the heart of democratic society—which can be done either by reproducing them artificially or by strengthening such residues of aristocracy as may continue to exist.

> I conceive a society, then, which all, regarding the law as their work, would love and submit to without trouble; in which the authority of government is respected as necessary, not divine, and the love one would bear for a head of state would not be a passion, but a reasoned and tranquil sentiment. Each having rights and being assured of preserving his rights, a manly confidence and a sort of reciprocal condescension between the classes would be established, as far from haughtiness as from baseness (9).

Tocqueville's political science begins from a recognition that considerations of reason and necessity—which is to say, of self-interest—have irreversibly supplanted the aristocratic desire "to do good without self-interest like God himself" (500). But by working within these horizons which have been shaped by modern rationalism, Tocqueville's political science will seek to preserve something like the old notion of aristocratic freedom—but that will also require maintaining a certain amount of inequality. If "a sort of reciprocal condescension" is established between the rich and the

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refute Zetterbaum's claim that he "refused to acknowledge" the "permanence and intransigence" of "the dichotomy between democracy and human excellence" (1967, 84).

[151] That Tocqueville's notion of rights is aristocratic rather than democratic is most persuasively argued by Winthrop (1991, 423-4; 1993, 208, 214-5). For the alternative, more libertarian Tocqueville, see Kessler 1994, 34, 47-9, 203 n.1. Koritansky claims that Tocqueville, like Rousseau, found the model for freedom

poor in democracy, Tocqueville suggests, the new societies will contain neither the great pride nor the utter servility of former ages, but they will permit both classes to retain a moderate amount of dignity.

In a society constituted in this way, there will be "less brilliance than within an aristocracy" but also "less misery; enjoyments will be less extreme and well-being more general; sciences less great and ignorance rarer; sentiments less energetic and habits milder; one will note more vices and fewer crimes" (9). Tocqueville does not try to deceive his fellow aristocrats about what they will need to leave behind. He states quite clearly that they must come to recognize the need to abandon "*forever* the social advantages that aristocracy can furnish" (9, emphasis added). Democracy does offer very real goods (9), but it is necessary to face up to the fact that accepting them entails drastically lowering one's sights and one's expectations from political life.[152] However, this aristocratic sense of loss—which Tocqueville himself seems to display here—is to some extent eclipsed by the pressing political need which this book seeks to address. Since equality is too strong to overturn, all true partisans of human greatness must recognize that the only avenue open to them is to moderate and guide democracy from within.

> To instruct democracy, if possible to reanimate its beliefs, to purify its mores, to regulate its movements, to substitute little by little the science of affairs for its inexperience, and knowledge of its true interests for its blind instincts; to adapt its government to time and place; to modify it according to circumstances and men: such is the first duty imposed on those who direct society in our day.

"in the pre-civilized condition of man" (1986, 26), but he also stresses the need to give it an active, political direction through the General Will.

[152] Consider especially in this regard Tocqueville's comments at the end of I.2.6 (234-5) in the light of that chapter's more positive title.

A new political science is needed for a world altogether new (7).

By accepting democracy not only as "an accomplished fact" (13) but also as something fundamentally just, Tocqueville and his new political scientists will be able to influence democracy (if only to a certain extent) because they will speak, and hopefully be accepted, as its friends. As Tocqueville writes at the opening of Volume II, "Men do not receive the truth from their enemies, and their friends scarcely offer it to them; that is why I have spoken it" (400). In democracy, as he makes abundantly clear throughout the work, the sole governing power is the majority, and its power is omnipotent. But Tocqueville nowhere says that the majority cannot be instructed and directed—if that was the case, then his task would be futile (cf. 672). Indeed, it would appear to be the case that by accepting democracy, and, perhaps more importantly, by taking its moral claims seriously, Tocqueville's political science will be able to exercise a moderate and moderating influence on public opinion from behind the scenes.[153]

Speaking to the new society on its own terms, the new political science will need to discover democratic solutions to democratic problems (cf. Zetterbaum 1967, 101). Most famously, Tocqueville recommends the formation of associations which can "replace the individual power of nobles" and serve as an intermediate body between the government and the people (9). More fundamentally, however, his task requires finding a way to persuade citizens to continue to make "great sacrifices" even when the standard to which they look has become "enlightenment and experience" rather than "enthusiasm and ardent [religious] beliefs" (9). As previously indicated, Tocqueville appears to suggest

[153] For Tocqueville's "indirect strategy," see Ceaser 1990 26-40, 156-8; 1991, 306ff.

that the moral devotion to liberalism which Enlightenment thinkers like Spinoza tried to instill simply did not take hold. Rather, according to Tocqueville, it seems that the serious, amoral core of Spinozism and of similar philosophies filtered down to the general population, which began to think in terms of power and interest rather than rights. To rehabilitate a sense of duty and moral obligation, and thus also to resuscitate the spirit of political virtue, Tocqueville's political science will attempt to instill the paradoxical belief that self-sacrifice can be grounded on self-interest. It will propagate the doctrine of 'self-interest well understood,' which holds "that to profit from society's benefits, one must submit to its burdens" (9) even should those burdens entail acts of self-forgetting whose payoff is not immediately clear.

As one might be tempted to suspect, such a feat will require re-animating society with religion, all the while paying careful attention to the kinds of beliefs that a deeply skeptical democratic public will and will not accept. Tocqueville's political science therefore has some common ground with the Enlightenment's political science insofar as it has a practical, philanthropic aim. But the solutions which Tocqueville proposes—starting with a recommendation to strengthen religious belief—not only cut against the grain of the early modern project, they are also rooted in a series of theoretical observations which are not shaped by either loyalty or hostility to that project. Tocqueville claims simply to accept democracy or modernity as an "accomplished fact" and not to judge whether it has been "advantageous or fatal to humanity" (13). He thus appears to study the political results of the Enlightenment in a way that is alien to the spirit of the Enlightenment. He begins from political life as it is, that is, as it presents

itself in actual society rather than as it can be conceived theoretically in an abstract state of nature. Thus, he derives his insights from the observations of a real place, America, and what he seeks to discover there is not the nature of man per se but the nature of democracy—that is, what *its* "natural consequences" are and what effects *it* has "naturally given to the laws," to government, and to society as a whole (13).[154] And yet, Tocqueville is also very far from the view that human beings are entirely the products of social convention. On the contrary, he indicates that by observing life within the 'natural' confines of convention, and by taking the opinions that animate political life seriously, the potential Tocquevillian political scientist will be able to follow him in seeing "not differently, but further than the parties" (15).[155]

As he describes it, this dialectical ascent allows Tocqueville to fulfill a theoretical and a practical goal. Theoretically, it allows him to satisfy a legitimate curiosity;[156] practically, it allows him to find lessons in America "from which we"—that is, we Europeans—"could profit" (12). For reasons that are perhaps not entirely made clear in the introduction, Tocqueville's task as a political philosopher entails a certain social

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[154] This lesson about Tocqueville's method seems to be conveyed by the title of Manent's study (Manent 1996).

[155] In this respect, Tocqueville appears to be close to the classical position regarding the political nature of man and the capacity of the scientist to undergo a dialectical ascent through the study of the latter. See Eden 1992.

[156] Tocqueville's statement that "it is not only to satisfy a curiosity, otherwise legitimate, that I have examined America" could suggest that this intellectual satisfaction was actually his primary purpose. If it is not sufficient to refute Koritansky's claim that "From the perspective of classical philosophy, what is absent from Tocqueville is the idea of contemplation as the activity for the sake of which all other human activities can be directed" (1986, 11), it at least raises the preliminary possibility that Tocqueville regarded theoretical activity as something that could be pursued as an end in itself. Agreeing in this respect with Koritansky, Lawler marshals evidence from Tocqueville's letters and from his *Recollections* which seems to indicate that he could not find philosophy humanly satisfying, and that he turned to political life for this reason (1993, 107ff.). At the end of this chapter I will attempt to argue that, even if Tocqueville did display

responsibility. He seeks in the United States "an image of democracy itself"—that is, an idea of its very nature and of the effects it produces when it is "abandoned almost without restraint to its instincts"—but he also will elucidate the precautions which the Americans have and have not "made use of to direct it" (13). America will therefore enjoy a dual-role in Tocqueville's book. It will sometimes appear as democracy incarnate, the exaggerated image of an egalitarian society. At other times, however, it will serve as an example of a polity which has more or less successfully restrained democracy by relying on various aristocratic counterweights. As we will soon see, foremost among these is the apparently successful American use of religion, which Tocqueville calls the "most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries" (519).[157]

As "an image of democracy itself," America allows Tocqueville to observe the effects of the triumph of the Enlightenment on the human soul. As the rest of this chapter will attempt to make clear, the phenomenon which he terms "individualism" appears to be the unintended result of the Enlightenment's successful attempt to create a political order marked by religious doubt and self-interested calculation. The social contract theorists taught that, in their natural and most clear-sighted state, human beings are guided neither by a concern for divine law nor for duties to others, and Spinoza in particular sought to reproduce such a state within society. When viewed as a representative of democracy's unrestrained instincts, Tocqueville's America reveals such

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a marked political ambition, there is some evidence in *Democracy in America* to attribute to him a more classical conception of intellectual virtue.

[157] For a list of the "considerable" residual aristocratic elements which Tocqueville finds in American society, beginning with religion but extending to ideas of rights and various English constitutional inheritances, see Mansfield and Winthrop 2006, 100-1. See also Boesche 1987 and Ceaser 1990, 36.

a project's dangerous potential for success. As previously mentioned, it presents the spectacle of a rational citizenry that calculates on each occasion the costs and benefits of cooperating with society, and it thus paradoxically produces something like the state of nature within society (Manent 1996, 26-8). From his observations of America, however, Tocqueville comes to the conclusion that such a society tends to distort rather than most fully express human nature. He finds the Americans to be far from content, and he attributes the restiveness and the anxieties which they display in the midst of their abundance to a deep if unrecognized dissatisfaction with this skeptical and calculating ethos. As he hints in the introduction, the decline of religion has accompanied a decline of communal attachments, and both of these in turn have led to a weakening of those deep passions for self-overcoming which once gave aristocratic society so much vitality. Contemporary European society, he writes, is tranquil only because it believes itself to be weak, infirm, and near death: "like the passions of old men that end only in impotence, desires, regrets, sorrows, and joys produce nothing visible or lasting" (10).

Indeed, Tocqueville reserves his harshest words in the introduction for what would appear to be the radical vanguard of the Enlightenment: those "who, in the name of progress, striving to make man into matter, want to find the useful without occupying themselves with the just, to find science far from beliefs, and well-being separated from virtue" (11).[158] These appear to be the apostles of atheistic modernity, the intellectual foot-soldiers of the Enlightenment which Spinoza sought to create. They consider justice to be subservient to utility, philosophy to be entirely separate from theology, and man to

be simply a particle of nature. But while Spinoza predicted that the spread of this kind of religious skepticism would benefit intellectual life, Tocqueville, writing a century and a half later, records that this only had the effect of rendering "virtue . . . without genius and genius without honor" (12). Considering civic virtue to be irrational, philosophy turned its back on society, and society, it would appear, returned the favor by ceasing to hold intellectual life in high esteem. Spinoza's high-aiming liberalism backfired; it created a crassly materialistic and therefore anti-intellectual society. When the atheistic-materialism of the radical Enlightenment took hold among the highest levels of the vulgar, it became very degraded. The idea of the *summum bonum* did not survive its severance from the divine. Rather, the idea of historical progress which Spinoza first elaborated transformed itself from a means into an end, and the faith which was once placed in God took history for its object instead. As Tocqueville writes in his chapter on poetry, as equality not only eradicates aristocratic institutions but even begins to assimilate nations, "faith in positive religions" falters and men are instead "disposed to conceive a much vaster idea of divinity. . . . Perceiving the human race as a single whole, they easily conceive that one same design presides over its destiny, and they are brought to recognize in the actions of each individual the tracing of a general and constant plan according to which God guides the species" (461-2). The materialists whom Tocqueville singles out in the introduction claim to be the vanguard of this divine historical plan; they call themselves "the champions of modern civilization, and they insolently put themselves at its head" (11), but in so doing they threaten to prepare a future in which

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[158] As Mansfield and Winthrop note (2006, 82-3, 103 n.6), Tocqueville subdivides his two major audiences

man has become matter and in which the requirements of human dignity can thus no longer dictate what is "forbidden or permitted, or honest or shameful, or true or false" (12). The most alarming danger which threatens Europe, then, is a kind of moral nihilism which would appear to be directly attributable to the most radical strain of Enlightenment thought. In a world in which that strain has finally become triumphant, Tocqueville fears, there may come into being a new and unprecedented kind of tyranny whose boundaries cannot be foreseen—a tyranny which will justify itself by the "impious maxim" that "everything is permitted in the interest of society" (280).[159]

Tocqueville, however, insists that America is noteworthy because the strength of religion which reigns there has been able to prevent anyone from espousing such a maxim. When the United States is viewed not as the extreme of unmitigated democracy but as the home of a series of successfully implemented aristocratic counterweights, its peaceful and religious democracy can stand as an instructive example for the emulation of a disordered and potentially tyrannical Europe. In Europe Christians who oppose democracy face off against democrats who are hostile all religious beliefs (10-12), but Tocqueville insists that this situation is so unnatural as to violate "all the laws of moral analogy." If it was more aware of itself, he suggests, Christianity would recognize its

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into six smaller groups (10-11). Of those six, this is the only group about which he has nothing kind to say.

[159] This appears to be one of the few places where Tocqueville seems to predict that the despotisms of the democratic age might not be of the "soft" variety. One prominent criticism of his work, to which we will return below, blames him for failing to foresee the kind of tyrannies that in fact did come into existence in the century after the one in which he wrote (see, for example, Anastaplo 1991, 457 and Banfield 1991, 51-2). Interestingly, while Banfield faults Tocqueville for his invocations of patriotism and civic devotion, Anastaplo blames him—and the modern project of which he takes him to be "too much" (p. 456) a part—for neglecting such considerations entirely. Whereas the one claims that his admiration for patriotism over moneymaking paved the way for "the Nazi regime" (Banfield 1991, 51-2), the other faults him for being too narrowly commercial and thus for inadvertently bringing about a barbaric reawakening of the call to

compatibility with democracy—as found above all in its teaching of human equality and of freedom as "the source of all moral greatness." Similarly, if democracy were more enlightened about its interests, it would recognize that "the reign of freedom cannot be established without that of mores, nor mores founded without beliefs" (11). But Tocqueville also implicitly suggests that he is the only European who believes democracy and religion to be compatible. Thus, were it not for the example of America, we might be tempted to suspect that Christianity cannot coexist with democracy or with liberalism—at least not in its orthodox form. But Tocqueville, as we will shortly see, insists not only that America has retained a genuinely Christian civil religion, but indeed, that it remains fundamentally *Puritan*, even in the 1830s (27-8, 267, 275). And Puritanism, as he will argue in the second chapter of Volume I, "was not only a religious doctrine; it also blended at several points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories" (32). Tocqueville therefore looks to the example of America because it allegedly demonstrates that even the most zealous and austere religiosity is in fact friendly to freedom and equality, or that Christianity and modern politics can coexist while remaining uncorrupted—though perhaps not uninfluenced—by one another.

AMERICA'S PURITAN FOUNDING

At the end of the first chapter of Volume I, as Tocqueville completes his description of the geography of North America and of the character of its native

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"make great sacrifices for the fatherland" (Anastaplo 1991, 457). For a more nuanced view which shows Tocqueville to be sensitive to the danger of both soft and hard despotism, see Ceaser 1990.

inhabitants, he concludes that although the Indians "occupied" the soil of the continent, "they did not possess it. It is by agriculture that man appropriates the soil," he writes, and since the Indians lived by hunting, they inhabited North America "only *in the meantime*"—they were destined to be swept aside on the day that "civilized men" came to settle there (26-7, emphasis original). According to Tocqueville's initial presentation, then, America "still formed only a wilderness" (26) on the day when Europeans discovered it. It appears to be an actual, historical example of what Locke called the state of nature, a "still-empty cradle of a great nation" containing the raw materials "for commerce and industry," just waiting for its latent wealth to be extracted by the efforts of human beings (27, cf. Locke *Second Treatise*, ch. 5). The United States, it would appear, is *the* Lockean nation, formed out of a pre-political state, governed (as Tocqueville writes in the headings for the next chapter) by a "*Social contract*" (27), and thus rooting itself on the maxims of a new, rationalistic political science, destined to conquer the vast American wilderness in an effort to usher in a new era of prosperity and material well-being. It was on that empty continent, Tocqueville writes, "that civilized men were to try to build a society on new foundations, and applying for the first time theories until then unknown or reputed inapplicable, they were going to give the world a spectacle for which the history of the past had not prepared it" (27).

The initial presentation which Tocqueville gives, then, is that American politics constitutes a great experiment; its foundations make clear the first ever attempt to put the insights of modern political thought into practice. He appears to allude to the new

political science spoken of in *The Federalist*[160] and to the revolutionary, distinctly modern principles of natural right and natural law which are expressed most powerfully in the Declaration of Independence. But this makes it all the more striking that, although Tocqueville was quite familiar with the Declaration and with the importance Americans gave to it, in this seminal—and extremely lengthy—work on the foundational ideas of politics in the United States, he fails to mention it a single time.[161] Instead, as he opens the second chapter of Volume I, Tocqueville appears to contradict himself completely and to provide a wholly contrary description of the character of American civilization. He now says that America did not have a founding but a "point of departure," thus insinuating that the origins of its politics were not wholly original but were instead rooted in inherited European conventions (Mansfield and Winthrop 2006, 98). Most importantly, however, he argues in this chapter that the true originators of democracy in the United States were not modern rationalists but Puritans, religious fanatics and ardent theocrats who came to America not to establish a society based on "new foundations" but, quite the contrary, to re-institute the ancient Hebrew republic which Spinoza goes out of his way to attack in chapters 17 and 18 of the *Treatise*. Tocqueville therefore actually suggests that America's true theoretical founder is not Locke but Moses,[162] that its political order is rooted not in reason but in revelation, and that the character of its inhabitants is shaped not by radical innovation but by an adherence to an ancestral divine

[160] See, for example, #9 (Hamilton, Madison, and Jay 1961, 67).

[161] Tocqueville's neglect of the Declaration is the central target of West's criticism of him (see West 1991). For a critique of this view, see Kessler (1994, 39-40, 167-8), who helpfully points to Tocqueville's unpublished comments about the Declaration (*ibid*. 207 n.1) which can be found in Pierson 1938, 181-2.

law. Or rather, Tocqueville suggests that America somehow combines each of these contrary elements, and that it therefore presents the spectacle of a "great social enigma" (37). This enigma is the genuine reconciliation of the "*spirit of religion* and the *spirit of freedom*" (43, emphasis original), a reconciliation which does not compel either to sacrifice its fundamental character and which therefore somehow successfully combines ancient and modern understandings of political life.

According to Tocqueville, the point of departure which he is about to describe is of such overriding importance for explaining the character of America in the 1830s that "Those who read this book will . . . find in the present chapter the seed of what is to follow and the key to almost the whole work" (29). He thus appears to hint that the establishment of this uneasy combination between orthodox religiosity and modern, liberal freedom will constitute a key part of the practical task of his "new political science." Moreover, by revealing how this can be achieved, Tocqueville's account in this chapter also promises to begin to make clear the theoretical relationship between religion and modern liberal-democracy. Tocqueville suggested in the introduction that the "great democratic revolution" is both divine and distinctly Christian, and in a later chapter he will state that "it was necessary that Jesus Christ come to earth to make it understood that all members of the human species are naturally alike and equal" (413).[163] At the opening

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[162] Kessler suggests that this honor should be extended to Jesus as well, but it is noteworthy that while references to the Old Testament abound in this chapter, the New Testament is never mentioned (see Kessler 1994, 166).

[163] While Tocqueville thus attributes a belief in human equality to Jesus, he does not explicitly attribute to him the belief that that there is an "equal right to *freedom* that each bears from birth," (413, emphasis added) as Kessler claims (1994, 83, 102, 108, 137). He states only that the ancient philosophers failed to teach this latter doctrine, not that Jesus actually did so. As will be made clear later on, Tocqueville associates Christianity with support for democracy (in the sense of equality of conditions), but one of his

of the present chapter, however, he considers the relationship between religion and democracy to be an unsettled matter, and indeed, he looks to the Puritan settlement of America because it provides the unprecedented example of a (religious) founding which is not enveloped in ignorance and "surrounded . . . with fables behind which the truth lies hidden" (28). Since Europe and America share "the same democracy" (3), and since peoples "always feel [the effects of] their origins," an examination of its point of departure will explain "the destiny of certain peoples that an unknown force seems to carry along toward a goal of which they themselves are ignorant" (28).

There can be no doubt, of course, that those peoples are the "Christian peoples" (7) of Europe who are being carried along toward an ever-increasing equality of conditions. If Providence or Jesus Christ really was the initiator of that movement, then the opportunity which we moderns have to study America's origins will reveal "in broad daylight what the ignorance or barbarism of the first ages hid from our regard" (28). Just as Providence in the introduction was presented both as an impersonal force and as a demand for human intervention, so too it here also sanctions a similar kind of freedom in the realm of intellectual activity: it permits us to examine the point of departure, and thus "to discern in the destiny of nations *first causes* that the obscurity of the past" concealed from our fathers (28-9, emphasis added). It will teach us whether democracy and Christianity are fundamentally interlinked (as Tocqueville often stresses throughout this

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most prominent themes is that such a democracy can exist in slavery as well as in freedom. Tocqueville does say that Christianity abolished slavery (326), but since it also made its peace with the virtual slavery that was medieval serfdom, one can question the degree to which Tocqueville intends for this to be read as his serious view of history. His introduction, after all, makes clear that the full consequences of Christianity's alleged destruction of servitude were not felt until after the Enlightenment.

work), or conversely, whether religion's continued presence in America is simply a residue of the past, one of those "incoherent opinions that are encountered here and there in society like those fragments of broken chains that one sometimes still sees dangling from the vaults of an old building, no longer supporting anything" (28).[164]

According to Tocqueville, the emigrants who came to settle on the shores of what would become the United States shared a set of common traits which eventually benefitted the mature political life of that nation. "Born in a country that the struggle of parties had agitated for centuries, and where factions had been obliged in their turn to place themselves under the protection of the laws, their political education had taken place in that rough school, and one saw more notions of rights, more principles of true freedom spread among them than in most of the peoples of Europe" (29). Their political experiences, and the lessons which they drew from them, seem to have corresponded with the teachings of the original social contract theorists. Living in an atmosphere of political agitation and insecurity, they recognized that the only way to escape such a condition was to adhere to a new principle of liberty according to which each is bound to respect the rights of others in those areas of their exclusive concern. This was the origin

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[164] Mitchell places great weight upon this last statement, which he reads as indicating Tocqueville's view that behind our more secular democracy today there can be found a deeper and more fundamental religious core (1995, 213). But from its context, it is not so clear that this statement should be taken in this sense. Tocqueville's simile would seem more accurately to refer to those anachronistic religious practices—such as Sunday closing laws—which often continue to exist in formerly religious societies and which frequently remain only because, like these chains dangling from old buildings, no one has yet gotten around to taking them down. Indeed, Tocqueville calls the reader's attention to a whole host of such antiquated and now unenforced laws and practices in endnote E (680-3). In this note, Tocqueville draws the reader's attention to the unenforced sumptuary laws that remained on the books in the 1830s, but he also notes the way in which the Sabbath is rigorously observed in America. By considering these things together, he seems to suggest that the latter is on its way to becoming as obsolete as the former. As will be argued more at length below, Tocqueville would not have been surprised by the secularization of American public life which occurred in the twentieth century.

of "the dogma of the sovereignty of the people," which Tocqueville often equates with the notion that there is a right to individual freedom that exists within what would today be referred to as a private sphere (29, cf. 381). But Tocqueville also indicates that these settlers were not simply content with the assurance of their personal freedom and security. For in addition to their political education, they also acquired a different but complementary education "in the midst of the religious quarrels that [then] agitated the Christian world" (29). The development of liberal notions of rights did not bring the wars of religion to an end because rights thus understood could not benefit the mind or the soul. In fact, it appears that for the latter aim these sectarian conflicts were actually beneficial.

In one of the more remarkable passages in *Democracy in America*, and one that makes clear the great difference that exists between himself and his Enlightenment predecessors, Tocqueville actually speaks rather glowingly about the religious conflict which Locke and Spinoza sought to eradicate. In the "fury" of sectarian violence, he writes, the character of the English, "which had always been grave and reflective, had become austere and argumentative." As a result, "Education had been much increased in these intellectual struggles; the mind had received a more profound cultivation" and "mores had become purer (29). With points of doctrine in dispute, it would appear, America's future immigrants did not draw the Lockean lesson about the theological irrelevance of "indifferent things." On the contrary, when faced with these disputes, they found it necessary, in their sobriety, to undertake a serious examination of the state of their souls—to the great benefit of both their minds and their moral character. The wars

of religion, one might say, harmed the body but could not harm the soul—they led to massive damage to life and to property, but they did not produce the injuries that come from popularized skepticism (cf. 418).

Now of course, this nostalgic salute to the wars of religion is clearly an overstatement, and it is hard to believe that Tocqueville could think that someone who would kill or maim another on account of his beliefs could possibly have a healthy soul. But he can look back nostalgically on the English Civil War and the Thirty Years War because, after the final victory of the Enlightenment, such events are no longer realistic possibilities. On the contrary, having experienced the Revolution, the Terror, and Napoleon, Tocqueville's French audience is likely to recognize that future conflicts will almost certainly have a fundamentally different, and perhaps far more bloody character. His rhetorical strategy here, as in the introduction, seems to be to allay the concerns of reactionaries by speaking well of Puritan religiosity, all the while attempting to warn rationalists and progressives of the dangers that are posed by what he later terms negative doctrines (286). Indeed, it is precisely to discover an alternative to the allegedly false dichotomy between liberal skepticism and orthodox intolerance that Tocqueville looks to these refugees from the wars of religion who first settled America. For among them, he suggests, one can discover a singular example of a new kind of freedom, "not the aristocratic freedom of the mother country, but the bourgeois and democratic freedom of which the history of the world still had not offered a complete model" (30). This liberty, as we will soon see, consisted not in mere individualism, or in the desire to remain free

from the thumb of authority, but rather in an aristocratic sense of virtue that continued to exist within the horizon of bourgeois equality.

According to Tocqueville, this latter possibility became manifest only in the settlements of the North, where there could be found a dual concern for both political liberty and religious truth. In the South, by contrast, "No noble thought" and "no immaterial scheme presided at the foundation of the new settlements" (31). Jamestown and the other Southern colonies, though also English, seemed to stray from the promise created by the conditions of their homeland. The Southern settlers forgot about religious soul-searching and became preoccupied instead with greed, and the colonies which they formed were accordingly dedicated to no end higher than the pursuit of material wealth. As a result, Jamestown naturally attracted only individuals of the lowest sort, mostly gold seekers and other "people without resources or without [good] conduct, whose restive and turbulent spirits troubled the infancy of the colony and rendered its progress uncertain" (30-1). These men possessed a liberty which was entirely unconstrained not only with respect to its ends but also with respect to the means by which these ends could be pursued. It is therefore not surprising that hardly "had the colony been created when they introduced slavery," which in turn came "to exert an immense influence on the character, the laws, and the whole future of the South" (31). At Jamestown, the unadulterated right of each to pursue material goods naturally led to an attempt to do so in an exploitative and tyrannical fashion; the desire of the settlers to be left alone and simply to live in isolation without fear of interference from others gave way in turn to the destruction of liberty and to the birth of a despotic society with all the typical vices

thereof. Far from leading to the flowering of the life of the mind, such a negatively construed freedom gave rise to an institution in slavery that, as Tocqueville affirms, "enervates the forces of the intellect and puts human activity to sleep" (31).

The fate of the secular and excessively materialistic South therefore appears to foreshadow Tocqueville's fears about the worst possibilities for the future of democratic man. It encapsulates the potential for equality, if not properly controlled and directed by a teaching about spiritual greatness, to direct man exclusively to the pursuit of well-being and therewith to isolation and to a kind of despotism that will eradicate human longing and human vitality.[165] In the North, by contrast, where "altogether contrary nuances were woven into this same English background" (31), this problem did not present itself. The immigrants who settled there came to America not to seek out material well-being but, on the contrary, "to obey a purely intellectual need" and, indeed, to undertake great sacrifices of comfort and security in order "to make *an idea* triumph" (32, emphasis original). They came to the New World to form a society which was egalitarian in its social makeup and politically free, but which also consciously sought to fulfill the higher potentialities of which human beings are uniquely capable. And those higher potentialities, as exhibited through their example, involved certain devotions, and certain duties to others, which, as we have seen, are fundamentally aristocratic in character. Thus, "the emigrants of new England," whom Tocqueville takes as a model for the entire North, voluntarily restricted their freedom by bringing with them "admirable elements of order and morality." They "went to the wilderness accompanied by their wives and

children" (32). Whereas the family receives no thematic treatment in Spinoza and is hardly mentioned in his description of the best republic, these settlers seem to find both political freedom and intellectual fulfillment only by remaining steadfastly attached to its binding ties and to a morality with which it is inextricably linked.

According to Tocqueville, it was the civilization of New England which was destined to become the model for the "whole American world" (32). There, the democratic idea of freedom coexisted in a healthy tension with the aristocratic idea of duty. Together, as Tocqueville now makes clear, these coalesced into the notion that liberty is meant to serve a higher, spiritual purpose which must in turn place restrictions upon its own exercise. New England's first immigrants, "or, as they so well called themselves, the *pilgrims*," belonged to a sect in England that was so austere that its members had been pejoratively given the name "Puritans" (32, emphasis original). Now in the 1830s, as Tocqueville will soon show, the spirit of sect and the importance of doctrine had given way in American religion to an emphasis on morality and tolerance. Among the Puritans, however, a commitment to "doctrine," which is to say, to truly orthodox religiosity, "blended at several points with the most absolute democratic and republican theories" (32). Because they came to America both to live "in their manner and pray to God in freedom" (32), they exhibited a commitment to religious freedom which at the same time took seriously and refused to undermine religion's most fundamental claims. Tocqueville names them "pious adventurers" (33), and he thus suggests that they somehow combined the steadfast independence of the American

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[165] For the connections between Tocqueville's discussion of slavery and his nightmare scenario for the

pioneer with an old-fashioned religious devotion that rendered their spirits radically communitarian.

Now, considering the decline in sectarianism and of the importance of doctrine which later occurred under America's mature liberal-democracy, it is reasonable to ask at this point whether Tocqueville's account of the Puritans is meant to be taken as an accurate historical description, or whether, on the contrary, it is intended as a salutary teaching for those who are living at a time when the kind of nobility described in this chapter is disappearing. Tocqueville quotes at great length Nathaniel Morton's description of the sacrifices undertaken by New England's first settlers, who set out into the wilderness fully convinced that they were literally re-enacting the story of the Book of Exodus, and who were confident that what they had endured would earn them the "rays of glory" appropriate for the founders of a New Israel (33). According to Tocqueville, this sentiment ennobles their enterprise and transforms it into something that an attachment to freedom alone, as in the South, could never produce. Morton's old-fashioned belief in divine providence "elevates his language." "In your eyes as in his, it is no longer a small troop of adventurers going to seek fortune beyond the seas; it is the seed of a great people that God comes to deposit from his hands onto a predestined land" (33). But since the Old Testament polity which the Puritans sought to reproduce can hardly be described as a liberal republic, how can Tocqueville plausibly claim that they were the originators of the "bourgeois and democratic freedom"—the belief that each is simply to be left to himself in those areas of his exclusive concern—which is at the core

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character of the democratic soul, see Lerner 1987, ch. 5.

of the dogma of the sovereignty of the people? Were not the Puritans simply pre-liberal or Biblical in their understanding of politics, as Tocqueville himself seems to indicate when he says that their religion was "*almost* as much a political theory as a religious doctrine" (35, emphasis added)? Since their piety was rooted above all in a sense of duty to God, family, and community, it would appear at least somewhat puzzling to suggest, as Tocqueville does, that their piety could be successfully combined with the spiritual independence of the American pioneer.

It therefore seems likely that Tocqueville's description of the Puritans is meant to be taken not as a literal recounting but rather as an attempt to show how these two fundamentally opposed understandings of political life could perhaps be fused together. This becomes most clearly evident as he quotes the text of the Mayflower Compact—or rather, a very loosely translated version of it—and tries to present it as America's original social contract. Taking this document as a model, future American settlers "constituted themselves" into political society. Arriving in an uninhabited wilderness, which the reader is here again tempted to equate with the state of nature, "they name their magistrates" and give themselves laws "as if they came under God alone" (37). But that latter qualification is not a mere figure of speech, for the original Plymouth settlers combined themselves into a political society not only to ensure their security, but also to work "for the glory of God, the development of the Christian faith and the honor of our country" (Tocqueville 2010, 59). Tocqueville thus tries to present the Mayflower Compact as a kind of amalgam of the Enlightenment's social contract teaching and Old Testament Judaism, in which pre-political human beings come together and voluntarily

form a society which places restrictions upon their natural liberties not just for the sake of their own preservation, but also for the pursuit of certain higher responsibilities that can be found in a devotion to God and country. But Tocqueville's version of the Compact removes the settlers' acknowledgement of their fidelity to King James I, and it adds the word "contract" where the original speaks only of a "covenant"—which is of course a Biblical term (Tocqueville 2010, 59, cf. with ibid. n. r). As Tocqueville reminds us, "This took place in 1620" (35), twenty-two years before the publication of Hobbes' *De Cive* and thirty-one before *Leviathan*, a work for which, it may safely be presumed, the Puritans would have had little sympathy.

By reading this alternative, half-liberal understanding of politics into America's founding, Tocqueville is able to portray an idealized but for that matter tension-ridden picture of what democracy in the United States stands for—a picture which can serve as a corrective to the Enlightenment rationalism which is dominant in the 1830s. To reveal "the password to the great social enigma" that is America—that is, to show how authentic religious belief could be successfully combined with liberal freedom—Tocqueville turns to a brief analysis of the legislation of this period, of which the "most characteristic" example is Connecticut's Code of 1650 (37). Unlike the Framers of the American Constitution, who in their commitment to liberty devoted their primary attention to political laws, the legislators of Connecticut gave greater importance to religious and moral obligations, and they therefore "occupied themselves first with penal laws" (37). To this end, they enacted a series of "bizarre" and "tyrannical" measures, literally copied from the books Deuteronomy, Exodus, and Leviticus, which enjoined the death penalty

for blasphemy, religious dissent, sorcery, and adultery. Excessively "preoccupied with . . . maintaining moral order and good mores," their laws "constantly penetrate into the domain of conscience" and hand down draconian penalties for the likes of drunkenness, lying, and even kissing (38-9). But Tocqueville also claims that Puritan society was "enlightened" and its "mores mild," which ensured that these measures were seldom actually applied. His Puritans are not the ones who would go on to conduct witch trials at Salem. Instead, they present the bizarre spectacle of an enlightened society in which that sort of religious zealotry has largely fallen by the wayside, but which nonetheless chooses to model its laws on the illiberal theocratic code of the Old Testament, with the result that such legislation is rarely if ever enforced.

In the detailed notes which he provides at the end of the work, Tocqueville acknowledges that within two generations the "rigor" of the Puritans was eventually "much weakened" (682), not to say corrupted.[166] Blessed with the benefit of hindsight, he uses his largely positive—if occasionally chastising—account of American politics in the 1620s as a model which can show how some salutary restrictions might be placed on the excessively materialistic democracy of the 1830s. Notable in this regard is Tocqueville's statement that Connecticut's "bizarre" and "tyrannical" penal laws "were not imposed" but in fact "were voted by the free concurrence of all the interested persons themselves" (39). This thus appears to be the very first American instance of the tyranny of the majority which has such a prominent place in his analysis of the United States.

[166] This is especially evident in a quotation which Tocqueville provides from a 1663 sermon denouncing New Englanders for forgetting the original, religious origins of their colony and devoting themselves instead to "increasing cent per cent" (688).

Moreover, in many instances it took the same kind of extra-legal form that Tocqueville would find in the 1830s, as mores, "more austere and more puritanical than the laws," attempted to regulate aspects of human behavior which even these intrusive regulations did not touch. But while Tocqueville calls these measures shameful "lapses," he leaves no doubt that he admires something of the spirit behind them. Indeed, the vehicle by which this censoriousness was put into practice turns out to be that most famous of all Tocquevillian remedies for the ills of democracy, the "association" (39). In choosing ancient Israel as their model for political virtue they sought to copy "the legislation of a rude and half-civilized people" (38) and thus crossed the line into the absurd, but even in so doing they accomplished something useful because they sought to endow freedom with an active, political direction which could combat individualism and lead citizens to communal attachments.

In an 1843 letter to Arthur de Gobineau, Tocqueville credits Christianity with inciting a social revolution which toppled certain "rude and half-savage virtues" that were typical of the ancient republic. Even so, he laments that the "duties of men among themselves as well as in their capacity of *citizens*, the duties of citizens to their fatherland, in brief, the public virtues seem to me to have been inadequately defined and considerably neglected within the moral system of Christianity" (Tocqueville 1959, 192, emphasis original). By modeling their politics on the Old Testament (rather than the New), Tocqueville suggests, the Puritans reintroduced into the modern world not only a spirit of moral restriction, but also that which is characteristic of a truly "political life" (42). Thus, he points out that Connecticut's draconian penal laws were accompanied by,

and "*in a way connected to*" another "body of political laws which . . . seems to anticipate from very far the spirit of freedom in our age" (39, emphasis added). These latter provisions contained all the libertarian "principles on which modern constitutions rest" (39), but they also contained several communitarian aspects such as a citizen militia (40) and the organization of political life around a township. In these localities, Tocqueville insists, one can discover "a real, active, altogether democratic and republican political life" in which interests, "passions, duties, and rights" are all "grouped around the township's individuality and attached to it" (40). Here, in this little *polis*, an awareness of one's personal rights is accompanied by, and indeed founded on, a sense of civic duty. In the township, the reality of modern democracy is infused with the spirit of the classical republic, and affairs "that touch the interest of all are treated in the public square and within the general assembly of citizens, as in Athens" (40).

Just as Nathaniel Morton called for some rays of glory to reach the earthy saints (33), the political spirit which Tocqueville salutes in these passages brings to the fore a rather un-Christian sense of pride. Paradoxically, however, that pride appears to be part and parcel with a sense that one's own excellence, in order to be justly celebrated, must be founded upon a capacity to engage in acts of authentic self-forgetting. Thus, Tocqueville's account of America's Puritan founding reaches its climax with a lengthy quotation of John Winthrop's "beautiful definition of freedom". According to that definition, there are in fact two kinds of liberty, the first of which is "a kind of corrupt liberty, the use of which is common to animals as it is to man" (Tocqueville 2010, 68). This understanding of liberty is virtually identical to that put forward by Hobbes and

Spinoza, the last of whom derives it by collapsing the distinction between man and non-human nature. It is the freedom "of doing whatever you please."[167] Because it possesses only a negative orientation, it leads to no good greater than mere life. It can produce nothing which is distinctly human, which is to say, nothing for which it is worthwhile to die. Entirely apolitical, it "is the enemy of all authority" and "it suffers all rules with impatience." As Tocqueville made clear in the introduction, such an understanding of freedom saps law of all legitimacy because it cannot lend its principled acceptance to those sacrifices and those limitations on freedom which are in fact demanded by all political and communal association. By promising liberation, it deceives us into becoming "inferior to ourselves" because it erodes that sense of prideful self-overcoming—of elevation above oneself—which is most distinctive of humanity. But according to Winthrop there also exists another kind of liberty, a "civil," "moral," and "holy liberty" which "we must defend at all costs, and if necessary, at the risk of our life:" this is "the liberty to do without fear all that is just and good" (Tocqueville 2010, 68-9). What would today be called positive liberty, a liberty which exists only so that man may have the opportunity to perfect himself through moral duty, appears to be essential for instilling in him those noble and immaterial sentiments that both call upon him to renounce his existence but in the absence of which that existence is felt to be entirely worthless. And as this chapter of *Democracy in America* has made clear, the

[167] Cf. Hobbes, *Leviathan* xiv.2; Spinoza, *Treatise* 16.2.1-5.

achievement of that lofty end requires not unrestricted freedom to make the right choice but moral restrictions, rooted in communal piety, and serving an educative function.[168]

Now, it would seem plausible to criticize the idea of positive liberty, as Kraynak does, as a tension-ridden halfway house between liberal and illiberal understandings of politics. But Tocqueville's sober teaching seems to be that such a halfway house, tension-ridden though it may be, is the only option available to us against the dangerous tendencies of an unmitigated liberalism. Since the intellectual and political worlds created by the Enlightenment cannot be overthrown, the best that we can do is to establish a dynamic contradiction, an intellectual muddying of the waters that will lead religion to think of itself as compatible with (though not identical to) liberalism, and liberalism to regard religion (and the sacrifice for which it calls) as vital to its survival. Thus, the massive surface impression which Tocqueville gives at the end of this chapter and throughout Volume I is that freedom and religion, which are "apparently so opposed," are actually "diverse but not contrary," and that it is "the character of Anglo-American civilization" which proves this (43). Thus, in the United States religion and freedom lend each other "mutual support"—the former sees that faith is likely to remain strong when the liberal separation of church and state has been accepted, and the latter considers that its own survival requires good mores, which cannot endure without beliefs

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[168] Given the prominent place which Tocqueville gives to John Winthrop's speech, it is hard to see how Kessler, among others, can conclude that Tocqueville's understanding of liberty "is largely negative and wholly devoid of religious content" (1994, 34; but cf. 120-1). Kessler states at one point that Tocqueville designed a "civil religion . . . primarily to protect the private rights of individuals" (p. 59), and he often seems to suggest that Tocqueville viewed religion as something supportive—rather than restrictive—of democracy's natural tendencies. Although he provides somewhat contrary indications at the end of his work, he often presents Tocqueville as "the first great political philosopher to reform Christianity in the

(43-4). But as Tocqueville will go on to make clear, this rosy picture of American religiosity actually hides a deeper but growing threat to the preservation of faith and freedom alike.

AMERICA'S REASONABLE CHRISTIANITY

Now, to preserve a spirited and self-sacrificial brand of piety in support of liberal republicanism and a regime of toleration was of course the central endeavor of Locke's project of religious reform. Tocqueville's observations about the character of American religion in Volume I therefore appear to provide powerful if not overwhelming evidence of the massive success which Locke's more moderate version of the Enlightenment enjoyed. He records that the separation of church and state among the Americans has actually brought about the strengthening of religion and has allowed it to serve, in his famous phrase, "as the first of their political institutions" (280). Through the example of how it is practiced, American Christianity seems to have demonstrated that toleration can eradicate sectarianism without eroding a serious attachment to religion itself and to the morality which it supports. Tocqueville records that in the United States there are so many sects that the vast differences between them have become almost meaningless. Americans give no importance to theological dogmas and religious ceremonies,[169] but they are united by a fierce attachment to "the morality of Christianity," which "is everywhere the same" (278). Convinced (with Locke) of the necessity of religious

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light of modern democratic conditions" (p. 59), and he thus seems to credit to him innovations which he describes but whose origins should more properly be attributed to his Enlightenment predecessors.

beliefs for the maintenance of social bonds, American judges refuse to accept the oaths of those who profess not to believe in God (280). In a similar fashion, American men consider stable families and good mores to be essential for the protection of freedom and commercial well-being, and they thus continually voice support for religion as an indispensible element for the maintenance of public morality (44, 279, 509, 565, 576, and esp. 594-5).

In the United States, it therefore appears, religious toleration goes together with the establishment of a universally accepted civil religion which, as one of Tocqueville's section titles declares, "SERVES POWERFULLY THE MAINTENANCE OF A DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC" (275). In true Lockean fashion, a transformed, civically-oriented version of Christianity preserves political freedom by placing a salutary limit on the great liberation of the individual which liberal-democracy permits. Although the American political world seems to be abandoned without restraint to human innovation, according to Tocqueville that innovation is limited in practice by the "empire over intelligence" which Christianity and Christian morality hold (279). By tightening the intellectual bond at the same time that the moral bond is relaxed (282), religion places a salutary restraint on the mind that prohibits even the thought of anti-republican sentiments: revolutionaries do not exist, and if they did, they would be unable to attract followers. "So, therefore, at the same time that the law permits the American people to do everything, religion prevents them from conceiving everything and forbids them to dare everything" (280). In the United States, Tocqueville writes, "there is no single

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[169] Tocqueville will elaborate upon this at the opening of Volume II. Cf. 404 and 421-2.

religious doctrine that shows itself hostile to democratic and republic institutions" (277). Christianity has therefore been transformed into a support for the liberal regime precisely because that regime has bought into being an unprecedented uniformity of opinion. American Christians, both Protestant and Catholic, "all perceive their religion in the same light" (423)—they not only agree on specific theological tenets (or lack thereof), they also share a common perception of what religion is. Thus, "there reigns so to speak only a single current in the human mind" (277), and American priests have adjusted their message so as to conform to it.

As a true civil religion, American Christianity is rooted in the power of "the sovereign" (278)—that is, the majority. It reigns "on the admission of all" (279), which is to say, "much less as revealed doctrine than as common opinion" (409). But Tocqueville also seems to suggest that this neither jeopardizes the benefits that come from authentic religious belief nor threatens to prevent the genuine spiritual liberation which both freedom and religion promise. His description of religion's hold on the American mind recalls his earlier discussion of the power which the majority exercises over thought (243-5). But while he there claimed that "there is no freedom of mind in America"—a fact which is sufficient to explain why there are no truly outstanding works of the intellect in the United States—he also gave an example of the "good use" to which the majority's intellectual power can be put. That example—the prime example which Tocqueville gives in his discussion of the tyranny of the majority—concerns religion: the majority, he says, has been able to take away even the thought of publishing books which are hostile to religion or which undermine good mores. He writes that the beneficial use

of this power "is only an accident" (245), but in his thematic discussion of religion in Volume I he seems to point the way to understanding how the majority could come to use its own omnipotence in order to restrict itself. He indicates that religion's hold as common opinion in America rests to a great extent on the fact that, while "some profess Christian dogmas because they believe them," others do so "because they are afraid of not looking like they believe them" (279). These others may include philosophers like Spinoza, but they may also include potential revolutionaries like Napoleon. This therefore seems to be a beneficent version of the tyranny of the majority—or rather, since Tocqueville declares that the notions of tyranny and benefit will never be united in his thought (216), it would perhaps be better to call it a harsh but necessary restriction.[170]

Since the majority in democracy constitutes the sole social power, and since that power is political, moral, and intellectual all at the same time (243), the only restriction which can be placed upon it must come, paradoxically, from its own self-limitation. But Tocqueville suggests that such a feat is both possible and ennobling: carrying on the legacy of the Puritans, he indicates, the Americans have continued to espouse a "democratic and republican Christianity" (275) which preserves their freedom because it

[170] This apparent contradiction between Tocqueville's discussion of the tyranny of the majority in I.2.7 and his discussion of religion in I.2.9 has been noted by Kessler (1994, 115) as well as by Catherine Zuckert (1993, 232). Faced with this tension, both of these authors conclude that Tocqueville ultimately abandoned hope in religion's ability to provide an effective restraint on democracy (see also Zetterbaum 1967, 123). Kessler emphasizes the institutional elements of Tocqueville's "secular strategy," while Zuckert goes so far as to suggest that he changed his mind about religion in the five years between the publication of Volume I and Volume II. This objection is not weak, since it would seem unreasonable to expect a religion grounded in public opinion to exercise an effective restraint on public opinion. Nonetheless, I am going to suggest that Tocqueville is quite serious about this, and that it constitutes one of the chief examples of his attempt to provide a democratic solution to democratic problems. That this solution is not so obviously prone to coming unraveled will become evident once we consider that Tocqueville regards religion not simply as a "civil religion" aimed at population control but as the locus for man's natural longing for immortality—and his teaching about the latter remains consistent throughout both volumes.

restricts it and which furthermore permits them to conceive and carry out great political projects. Tocqueville indicates that American religion has become almost entirely divorced from its original Biblical foundations, but those foundations have been replaced with a deep and abiding patriotism and by a spirited devotion to the cause of liberal-democracy. He records having witnessed a political gathering of two or three thousand people whose purpose was to provide arms and money in support of Polish independence. At the end of this meeting a priest delivered a prayer on behalf of the Poles asking God to protect their freedom and to end the evils of occupation. Were it not for a passing mention of Christ's passion at the end (277), it would be hard to characterize the civic piety contained in this address as specifically Christian. Indeed, Tocqueville indicates that among the Americans Christianity seems to have melded into a more general but nonetheless deeply spiritual devotion to the maintenance of their republican institutions: they "so completely confuse Christianity and freedom in their minds that it is almost impossible to have them conceive of the one without the other" (280-1). Their concern with their eternal fate has thus become blended together—in a kind of strange mental fog—with their more worldly interests, but it appears to be precisely this union of heaven and earth that gives them their distinctive, zealous, and deeply devotional brand of civic piety. Believing that religion and freedom must go together, they send priests on missions into the wilderness both out of a genuine attempt to merit heaven by saving souls and because they are convinced that if the new states are not religious they will not be free, and if they are not free they will threaten the republicanism and the prosperity of those states that already exist (281).

It is often tempting to read Tocqueville so as to suggest that the piety of his Americans is focused exclusively on the concerns of the present life. But while Tocqueville will go on to acknowledge the danger that religion in democracy will become simply a rubber-stamp for the desire for material well-being, it is noteworthy that, especially in the present chapter, he never goes this far. Instead, he describes how the spirit of religion and that of freedom have become somehow incorporated "into one another" (43). The American missionaries whom he describes have a motivation that is simultaneously political and religious: their concern for self-interest has merged with one for civic duty, their hope for "Heaven in the other world" has fused together with a desire for "well-being and freedom in this one" (43, 281). Similarly, although Tocqueville notes that utilitarian calculations are often—if not always—at the root of American religiosity (280), he nonetheless declares that "America is . . . still the place in the world where the Christian religion has most preserved genuine powers over souls." Hypocrisy "ought to be common" in a place like the United States (278), but the surprising thing, apparently, is that it is not. Americans therefore seem to have successfully achieved the spirited combination of devotion and self-interest, of reason and faith, and of civil religion and authentic piety whose possibility Locke sought to outline. They plunge into the wilds at great personal risk for what they tell themselves are self-interested reasons; they believe simultaneously in Christianity's truth and in its political necessity; and, perhaps most importantly, they equate the Gospel's message with a support for liberal-democratic morality, but this does not inhibit those acts of devotion and self-sacrifice which can only arise from genuine faith.

If America's utilitarian but also apparently sincere faith can be associated with Locke's reasonable Christianity, the more radically secular outlook which was prevalent among the European elites of Tocqueville's time can claim an affiliation with the author of the *Theologico-Political Treatise*. Tocqueville touts his observations of American piety as proof that those Europeans who "believe with Spinoza in the eternity of the world," and who link the cause of liberty to the destruction of faith, have in fact "no more seen religious peoples than free peoples" (281). But while Tocqueville thus suggests that French revolutionary thinkers like Voltaire and Diderot—to say nothing of Spinoza himself—misunderstood the meaning of both faith and freedom, he also provides some quiet indications that America's religiosity, apparently so robust, may in fact contain the seeds of a more 'European' outlook. At the conclusion of his thematic discussion of religion in Volume I, Tocqueville provides a brief account of the process by which America's liberal religiosity may have come into being. When religion is attacked by "negative" doctrines, which affirm the falseness of one religion without establishing the truth of any other (286), he writes, deep doubt and apparently zealous belief tend to advance together. When the intellectual climate of an era attacks religion in general, such as happened in the eighteenth century (282), men "let the object of their dearest hopes escape them almost by forgetting."

> In ceasing to believe religion true, the unbeliever continues to judge it useful. Considering religious beliefs under a human aspect, he recognizes their empire over mores, their influence on laws. He understands how they can make men live in peace and prepare them gently for death. He therefore regrets his faith after he has lost it, and deprived of a good of which he knows the entire value, he fears to take it away from those who still possess it (286).

Now, in the course of his analysis in Volume I, Tocqueville has attributed similar beliefs to the Americans.[171] Although he has given the overwhelming impression that American piety is "genuine" (278), he has also claimed that it is impossible to verify this by looking to the bottom of hearts (280). He thus seems to invite the reader to do what many students of Tocqueville have done and to question whether the faith of the Americans, which constantly has concerns of this world in view, can really be as sincere as he seems to insist that it is.[172] For according to Tocqueville, when large parts of the public—or at least society's elites—adopt a more far-sighted outlook than is present, say, in Voltaire; when they continue to see the civic benefits which religion provides even as they cease to believe in miracles and in the theological authority of the Bible; when they, along with Locke, come to recognize the "reasonableness, or rather necessity" of Christianity,[173] they work, almost despite themselves, to produce a religiosity that is as zealous as it is hallow. "With those who do not believe hiding their disbelief and those who believe showing their faith, a public opinion in favor of religion is produced; people love it, sustain it, and honor it, and one must penetrate to the bottom of their souls to discover the wounds it has received" (287).

In contrast to his initial impression, then, Tocqueville provides a reason to suspect that the Americans' punctilious attention to "all the external duties of religion" (282) may

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[171] Of course, Tocqueville himself also analyzes religion "from a purely human point of view" and presents a teaching about its political utility and about its helpfulness as "the consolation of all miseries" (284). It is therefore tempting to take this statement as at least to some extent autobiographical. In a famous letter to Sophie Swetchine at the end of his life, Tocqueville describes an unwilling loss of faith which he experienced at sixteen after reading some books in his father's library. The relevant passage is quoted in full by Jardin, who insists that the works in question were those of Rousseau and Voltaire (Jardin 1988, 61-2). A translation of the entire letter can be found in Tocqueville 2002, 334-7.

[172] For one of the best examples, see Manent 1996, 83-107.

reveal a similar superficiality. In a statement that is much more frank than anything he wrote in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville observed to his friend and cousin Louis de Kergorlay that, in spite of the Americans' outward piety, "there is a great store of doubt and indifference hidden underneath these external forms." Although the Americans were full of religious zeal "in days gone by," at the present time it is "expiring day by day. Faith is evidently inert; enter the churches (I mean the Protestant ones) and you hear them speak of morality; of dogma not a word, nothing that could in any way shock a neighbor" (Tocqueville 1985, 48). And this, according to Tocqueville, seems to bode ill for the future not just of American religion, but for all intellectual life, for the "human spirit loves to plunge itself into abstractions of dogma" (*ibid*.). As Tocqueville later indicates, "There is almost no human action, however particular one supposes it, that does not arise from a very general idea that men have conceived of God, of his relations with the human race, of the nature of their souls, and of their duties toward those like them" (417). The attempt of the early modern thinkers to separate religious dogma from religious morality was therefore strictly speaking untenable. Since every human action is ultimately dependent on notions that are, from a Lockean perspective, "indifferent," each of those notions places a "a salutary yoke on the intellect" which is necessary for man's "happiness" as well as his "*greatness*" in the present life (418, emphasis added). By focusing on "the duties of men toward one another" (278) while simultaneously discouraging human beings from engaging in the kind detailed reflection about the dogmatic sanctions for those duties which the Puritans underwent, modern rational

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[173] *The Reasonableness of Christianity* (172[105]).

religion appears to pose a real threat to human intellectual life. When this "salutary yoke" is relaxed and "doubt takes hold of the highest portions of the intellect," Tocqueville declares, it "half paralyzes all the others." Then, each "becomes accustomed to having only confused and changing notions about matters that most interest those like him and himself; one defends one's opinions badly or abandons them, and as one despairs of being able to resolve by oneself the greatest problems that human destiny presents, one is reduced, like a coward, to not thinking about them at all" (418).

Tocqueville thus tells Kergorlay that the "so-called tolerance" which one finds in America, "in my opinion, is nothing but a huge indifference" (Tocqueville 1985, 48). This indifference, this milieu which accommodates literally hundreds of sects, "is hardly satisfying" to the human spirit—Protestants "live and die in compromise, without ever concerning themselves with reaching the depths of things" (ibid., 50). But if American Protestantism poses a substantial threat to the human intellect,[174] American Catholicism seems to embody the opposite danger. Indeed, although Tocqueville claims in *Democracy in America* that America's Catholics "form the most republican and democratic class there is in the United States" (275), he tells Kergorlay that in actuality they make use of the tolerance offered to them but privately remain "as intolerant as they have always been, as intolerant in a word as people who *believe*. . . . I am not sure that they would not be persecuting if they found themselves to be the strongest" (Tocqueville 1985, 50, emphasis original). So while the Protestantism of America's rich tends toward Unitarianism—a kind of deism which is "without strength and almost without life," the

Catholicism which is growing among the poor poses a real civic danger (but also a spiritual benefit). It "gives rise to real and profound beliefs; but it divides the human race into the fortunate and the damned, creates divisions on earth that should exist only in the other life" and is thus "the child of intolerance and fanaticism" (*ibid*. 53).[175]

Speaking as a convinced liberal—if a liberal of a new kind[176]—Tocqueville identifies as the central political problem of modern times the need to reconcile tolerance with the moral and intellectual seriousness that, for most people at least, can only be found in genuine, which is to say intolerant, religious belief. But of course, these two alternatives are not equally likely in 1835, a time when one still encounters ardent believers, but when one is scarcely likely to discover Puritans in favor of re-instituting the Mosaic Code. In the vast bulk of *Democracy in America* Tocqueville is therefore preoccupied with the more immediately pressing danger—democracy's potential to encourage assimilation and therewith to bring about indifference and the weakening of beliefs. Perhaps anticipating the liberal reforms which the Vatican would undertake in the twentieth century, Tocqueville records that Catholic priests in America provide theological arguments for toleration and the separation of church and state which would have shocked their European co-religionists (276). The intolerant attitude of American Catholics which he describes to Kergorlay may therefore be only a temporary phenomenon, destined eventually to give way under liberalism's tremendous power to

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[174] In this letter Tocqueville actually attributes this danger to *all* Protestantism (Tocqueville 1985, 49-50). Cf. his comments in *Democracy in America* on Luther as preparing the way for the Enlightenment (404-5).
[175] Helpful discussions of this letter can be found in Galston 1992 and Kessler 1993. I discovered it in Owen (forthcoming), to which this account of the latent religious apathy of Tocqueville's Americans is also highly indebted.

influence the moral opinions of those who live under it. But the danger inherent in this development would seem to make it all the more necessary to fight against it to the extent that it is possible to do so, even or especially if it should mean making society less liberal. As Tocqueville wrote to Gobineau:

> There are, of course, certain doctrines that are necessarily part and parcel of certain religions, and which are not the exclusive attributes of any one of them. Such are the *virtue attributed to faith, the utility of faith, the necessity of faith, the inadequacy of deeds without faith*—and their consequence is that certain amount of intolerance with the contemporary absence of which you seem so satisfied. These doctrines are inherent in all religions . . . and they are necessarily inseparable from all the good they bring us. Yet I am convinced that the eventual damage to human morality thereby caused is far less than what would result from moral systems that have emancipated themselves from religion altogether. The longer I live the less I think that the peoples of the world can ever separate themselves from a positive religion; and this growing conviction makes me less concerned with these inconveniences that are eventually inherent in every religion, including the best.[177]

Tocqueville's concern for religion is therefore no less utilitarian, and even no less this-worldly than the Enlightenment's, but he locates that utility in an intellectual and spiritual realm. Or rather, since Locke and Spinoza both expected liberalism to produce outstanding works of the intellect along with great civic devotions, it would perhaps be more accurate to say that, according to Tocqueville, their expectations rested on a misunderstanding of the natural psychology that lies behind religious belief. Tocqueville's section entitled "ON THE PRINCIPAL CAUSES THAT MAKE RELIGION POWERFUL IN AMERICA" (282) occurs after his discussion of its civil

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[176] Tocqueville's famous characterization of himself as "a liberal of a new kind" occurs in a letter to Eugene Stoffels dated July 24, 1836 (Tocqueville 1861, 1:402).

[177] Tocqueville to Gobineau, October 2, 1843 (Tocqueville 1959, 205-6, emphasis original). Kessler points out that this letter also contains Tocqueville's declaration, curiously omitted by the editor Lukacs, that "Je ne suis pas croyant ['I am not a believer']" (See Kessler 1994, 193 n.1 and 3, with Tocqueville 1951- 9:57).

religion, and he thus appears to suggest that religion's genuine power over souls cannot be rooted in a concern for utility or for the maintenance of republican institutions. Indeed, Tocqueville begins this section by observing the visible failure of the predictions of the "philosophers of the eighteenth century," who, following Spinoza, predicted that religious zeal would "be extinguished as freedom and enlightenment increase[d]" (282). Intimating that he may at first have agreed with such thinkers, Tocqueville records that upon arriving in the United States he was "first struck" by the survival of religion among conditions of freedom (282). Feeling a "desire to know the cause of this phenomenon," he reports, "I interrogated the faithful of all communions." "To each of them I expressed my astonishment and exposed my doubts" (282-3). What he discovered was that each of his interlocutors "attributed the peaceful dominion that religion exercises in their country principally to the complete separation of church and state" (283).

The official answer of this section to the question posed in its title therefore seems to be that it is the separation of church and state which is the principal cause that makes religion powerful in America. As Tocqueville indicates, however, that is the agreed upon opinion of the parties, and as he noted in the introduction, his task in America was to undertake "to see, not differently, but further than the parties" (15). Thus, Tocqueville records that after confirming the virtues of the separation of church and state through his own observation, he then took an additional step. "I wanted to bring the facts back to the causes: I wondered how it could happen that in diminishing the apparent force of a religion one came to increase its real power, and I believed that it was not impossible to

discover this" (283). The answer that Tocqueville came to provides what is undoubtedly his fullest articulation of his understanding of human religious psychology.

> The short space of sixty years will never confine the whole imagination of man; the incomplete joys of this world will never suffice for his heart. Alone among all the beings, man shows a natural disgust for existence and an immense desire to exist; he scorns life and fears nothingness. These different instincts constantly drive his soul toward contemplation of another world, and it is religion that guides it there. Religion is therefore only a particular form of hope, and it is as natural to the human heart as hope itself. Only by a kind of aberration of the intellect and with the aid of a sort of moral violence exercised on their own nature do men stray from religious beliefs; an invincible inclination leads them back to them. Disbelief is an accident; faith alone is the permanent state of humanity (283-4).

Tocqueville's analysis of the separation of church and state therefore seems to serve chiefly as a means for the discovery, through a dialectical ascent from common opinion, of what he here calls "one of the constituent principles of human nature" (284).

Since, as we have just seen, religion in the usual sense of the term actually appears to be quite weak in America, it seems more likely that Tocqueville is actually explaining here why religious longings remain present despite this. In Volume II he will go on discuss the phenomenon of American restiveness, the tendency of the prosperous to remain agitated and miserable in the midst of their well-being precisely because the "soul has needs that must be satisfied" (510). He devotes a section of the long final chapter of Volume I to the ironically named "COMMERCIAL GREATNESS OF THE UNITED STATES," and what he there seems to indicate above all is the inability of the way life characteristic of a commercial republic to satisfy what is deepest in us and most distinctive of our humanity. He records how the Americans paradoxically "put a sort of heroism into their manner of doing commerce." In the two year voyage between Boston and China, for example, the American sailor will endure the most grueling hardships and

tremendous personal sacrifices in order to sell a "pound of tea for one penny less than the English merchant" (387). Tocqueville compares his devotion to commerce to that which the French displayed in the wars of the Revolution, and he notes, somewhat dryly, that what "the French did for victory," the Americans "do for low cost" (386). They use means befitting a noble goal in an attempt to achieve one which is entirely prosaic and thus unworthy of them, and this disproportion reveals a certain dissatisfaction, a continuing desire for something which commercial life taken on its own cannot provide. Democracy therefore has not eradicated the attractions of self-sacrifice, but it has made them more anomalous, and in so doing it has brought into relief a certain key defect which characterizes life under democracy—a "particular form of hope" that has no healthy outlet in the modern world, and which has therefore engendered a number of pathologies which the thinkers of the Enlightenment did not anticipate.

Tocqueville's comments on the longing for immortality therefore make clear how he understands what he frequently calls "human greatness:" that which is most distinctive of humanity and which separates man from all the other beings is precisely his simultaneous "natural disgust for existence" and "immense desire to exist." The hope for eternity, according to Tocqueville, always consists in a prideful desire to assert one's own excellence—one's elevated status which renders one deserving of immortality—but that sense of excellence is always intermixed with, and indeed founded upon, the deeply felt and by no means mercenary need to sacrifice oneself. After all, only someone who has shown himself willing to forget himself entirely can plausibly be said to merit this kind of resplendent self-affirmation. There would therefore appear to be a concern for justice in

a certain sense at the root of all such pride: the glory of a robber-baron or a tyrant would seem to be as empty and unfulfilling, as ultimately incomplete or inadequate, as the misery of someone whose self-abnegation goes unrewarded or unrecognized in the long-term. In a brief comment on this passage, Mansfield and Winthrop suggest that the disgust for life which Tocqueville describes here "resembles what Plato calls thumos" (Mansfield and Winthrop 2006, 86). This seems correct, but insofar as Tocqueville explicitly associates this complex and paradoxical longing with the desire for immortality, it would seem justified to associate it with *eros* as well.[178] To Tocqueville, because religion springs from this deep and ineradicable human hope, it is simply much more deeply rooted in human beings than Spinoza acknowledges. Indeed, even though the desire to affirm oneself by forgetting oneself may ultimately be self-contradictory, it is not self-contradictory to have a nature that demands two contradictory things. In Tocqueville's view, human beings are just so constituted, and any attempt to eliminate their erotic desires and their devotional longings, even by pointing out their inherently confused character, would seem to commit "a sort of moral violence" against human nature. Faith or hope may change its object, he indicates, but it will not die, and so to undermine orthodox Christianity, as Spinoza does, by shaking confidence in the authority of the Bible, can only lead to a redirection of religious desire. And as Tocqueville will

[178] Just how much Tocqueville was familiar with the works of Plato and Aristotle is somewhat unclear. Manent claims that he "barely read them" at all (Manent 2006, 115). But one does not necessarily have to have studied these thinkers to arrive at a similar conclusion to the one contained in their thought. Indeed, as previously mentioned, Tocqueville indicates in the current context that he derived this lesson about human nature much as Socrates himself did: by observing political life and by reflecting upon the character of ordinary moral opinions.

make clear in Volume II, many of the forms which *eros* can take under democracy have the potential to be profoundly damaging to the human soul.

REASON, PANTHEISM, AND THE DEMOCRATIC SOUL

In accordance with the indications which he provided in the introduction, Tocqueville's depiction of American religion in Volume I can be said to serve two complementary purposes. As "an image of democracy itself," his description of the United States shows the potential of a democratic society to trend in a more 'European' or Spinozistic direction—to diffuse skepticism or religious indifference across the body politic and thus to do violence to man's nature as an unfulfilled erotic being, with the result that now, in Tocqueville's words, "nothing any longer sustains man above himself" (300). But at the same time, Tocqueville's more positive, surface presentation of America provides an instructive example of the place which religion *could* hold within a certain a type of democratic society. It appears to make clear that it is at least possible for a religious consensus rooted in the social power of the majority to restrain the freedom of that majority and in so doing to preserve a sense of civic duty, religious devotion, and erotic longing. A society constituted on this basis would not be home to the seemingly superhuman devotions and accomplishments of the feudal aristocrat, but it could succeed in raising "the crowd up to themselves." By preserving those longings and psychological tensions which are distinctly human, in other words, it would at least

combat the imminent danger of "letting all citizens fall below the level of humanity" (301).

At the end of Volume II, Tocqueville informs his reader that five years of additional reflection have made this possibility, rather than the more straightforward tyranny of the majority, the new object of his fears (661; Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, liii). He now indicates that, if left unchecked and unmodified, democracy threatens to produce not tyranny, but an entirely new kind of despotism—a kind of all-encompassing bureaucratic state which will "degrade men without tormenting them" (662). This new kind of state will neither oppress nor dominate men, but it will brutalize them, and all the more so because it may very well do so with their consent. Tocqueville describes this new nightmarish vision in the following way:

> [A]fter taking each individual by turns in its powerful hands and kneading him as it likes, the sovereign extends its arms over society as a whole; it covers its surface with a network of small, complicated, painstaking, uniform rules through which the most original minds and the most vigorous souls cannot clear a way to surpass the crowd; it does not break wills, but it softens them, bends them, and directs them; it rarely forces one to act, but it constantly opposes itself to one's acting; it does not destroy, it prevents things from being born; it does not tyrannize, it hinders, compromises, enervates, extinguishes, dazes, and finally reduces each nation to being nothing more than a herd of timid and industrious animals of which the government is the shepherd (663).

This kind of administrative despotism must be distinguished from tyranny because tyranny is political, and hence also, at its core, erotic. But in a world where "passions are . . . contained, imagination bounded, [and] pleasures simple," "tyranny in a way lacks an occasion and a stage" (662). Whereas tyranny, even in its most wicked forms, is born of a version of those passions which belong to mankind alone, this so-called soft despotism will brutalize man precisely by extinguishing those pregnant desires and that distinctly

human sense of dissatisfaction which alone can give birth to grand political, spiritual, and intellectual achievements.

But of course, if these same desires are natural to man (as Tocqueville indicated in Volume I), it would appear puzzling to say that their ultimate eradication is possible and even likely. One of Tocqueville's chief tasks in Volume II will therefore be to reveal how it is that *eros* can become dimmed if not extinguished in democracy—or rather, he will indicate how it can turn in on itself and, in effect, destroy itself, and how future political scientists who are armed with knowledge of this danger can work to prevent it. As the remainder of this chapter will seek to show, the central task of Tocqueville's religious project in Volume II will be to support the maintenance of certain kinds of religious beliefs, compatible with but also restrictive of democratic intellectual trends, which can preserve certain distinctly human confusions in the democratic soul. This task not only fulfills the promise Tocqueville seemed to make in Volume I to show how a civil religion rooted in public opinion can also restrain that opinion, but, as he makes clear at the very opening of his second work, it will require constructing a bulwark against the popular influence of the Enlightenment's philosophic rationalism.

The opening chapter of Volume II, "ON THE PHILOSOPHIC METHOD OF THE AMERICANS," contains Tocqueville's most direct confrontation with the influence of the Enlightenment's political project. Its opening sentence, however, sets the theme for the rest of the work by making his estimation of the political results of that project abundantly clear. As he writes, "I think there is no country in the civilized world where they are less occupied with philosophy than the United States" (403). In America, unlike

in every pre-modern society, the members of the citizenry can be accurately said to exhibit a common "philosophic method": each gathers the insights by which he will guide his life not from revelation or theology or from a sense of the ancestral, but solely from "the individual effort of his reason" (403). Distrusting all intellectual authority and taking "tradition only as information" (403), refusing to trust in the answers provided by others and looking instead only to their own lights "as the most visible and closest source of truth" (404), the Americans as Tocqueville describes them seem to exhibit the outlook which Spinoza hoped would characterize a healthy liberal-democratic citizenry. But whereas Spinoza sought to create such a mindset because he was confident that the triumph of a popularized version of his own rationalism would favor the cause of its future cultivation by genuine philosophers, Tocqueville, examining the phenomenon of a rationalistic society in practice, apparently came to the opposite conclusion. Paradoxically, the triumph of the rationalism which Tocqueville here attributes to Descartes—but which could just as well be said to characterize his great student Spinoza—apparently created an intellectual atmosphere which was unequivocally hostile to philosophy in the true, undiluted sense of the term. "Americans do not read Descartes's works because their social state turns them away from speculative studies, and they follow his maxims because this social state naturally disposes their minds to adopt them" (403). Descartes, in other words, prepared a world in which men like himself would no longer exist.

The reason for this, Tocqueville suggests, can be found, somewhat surprisingly, in the commitment to intellectual independence which all Americans exhibit. While one

might suppose at first that the prevalence of such a mindset would lead to great intellectual diversity, Tocqueville indicates that, on the contrary, it actually produces an intellectual uniformity which leaves no place for the great intellectual disputes which have divided philosophers throughout history. Because Americans rely only on their own reason, "they easily conclude that everything in the word is explicable and that nothing exceeds the bounds of intelligence." They have "little faith in the extraordinary and an almost invincible distaste for the supernatural," but that lack of faith is not grounded on any genuine refutation of traditional theology. Rather, as Tocqueville strikingly suggests, "they willingly deny what they cannot comprehend" (404). Their rationalism, in other words, is a dogmatic rationalism, which is to say that it is no rationalism at all. There is no sense in America of an authentic and humanly meaningful tension between reason and revelation; on the contrary, there is a sense that this quarrel—if it was not meaningless in the first place—has been settled definitively. But that confidence, because it is rooted only in a powerful cultural prejudice, is entirely unfounded—and yet, unfounded though it may be, it is sufficient to prevent some future Descartes or Spinoza from turning the serious efforts of his intelligence to an investigation of the fundamental problem it obscures.

In America, according to Tocqueville, the belief in the authority of each's individual reason has resulted not just in the rehabilitation of the capacity of the human mind to arrive at truth, it has also produced the notion that all truth is graspable by each. Americans only believe what they can see for themselves, and this leads them to scorn forms as "useless and inconvenient veils" (404). But since they deny what they cannot

comprehend, it also leads them to believe that truth itself is something which is only as nuanced as their mental capacities will permit. By its very nature it can be unwrapped and examined "in broad daylight" (404). It is therefore telling that Tocqueville claims that the Americans deny the extraordinary as well as the supernatural, which suggests that their philosophic method is as hostile to the idea of human greatness as it is to divine greatness. Because "they ordinarily seek in the works of the mind only easy pleasures and instruction without work" (414-5), they appear to have no notion that philosophical investigations may require great effort and even a substantial amount of courage, let alone careful reading.

Now, Tocqueville traces the origins of this philosophic method not to Descartes but instead to Martin Luther (404). Because Luther, as Tocqueville claimed in the introduction, effectively democratized man's access to salvation (6), his submission "to individual reason [of] some of the dogmas of the ancient faith" (404) eventually prepared the way for Spinoza's more radical claim that the individual mind is sufficient to attain the *summum bonum* on its own. But Tocqueville, announcing an agreement with the ends of Spinoza's rationalism if not with its means, suggests that the Americans' philosophic method should be approached with caution "by those who see in the freedom of the intellect something holy" (410). Spinoza's project backfired, it appears, because even if he did recognize the need for popular dogmatism, he failed to appreciate the full consequences of the form which this dogmatism would take in an egalitarian society. Moreover, those consequences, according to Tocqueville, follow from the fact that man's devotional instinct is no less intellectual than it is political. Just as he had earlier

suggested that the root of human liberty is found not in independence but in devotion to something greater than oneself, he now indicates that the intellectual freedom even of the greatest philosopher requires "a salutary servitude that permits him to make good use of his freedom." "Thus, the question is not that of knowing whether an intellectual authority exists in democratic centuries, but only where it is deposited and what its extent will be" (408).

Tocqueville's answer, of course, is that this intellectual authority will be found in public opinion, which is set by the sovereign majority. But whereas in Volume I Tocqueville had stressed the capacity of this public opinion to muzzle political dissent, here in Volume II he begins to highlight the potential of the process which empowers it to do profound damage to the human soul. When each "withdraws into himself and claims to judge the world from there" (404), men living under democracy seem to put on display the prideful self-absorption and intellectual independence which Spinoza sought to inculcate. "When the man who lives in democratic countries compares himself individually to all those who surround him, he feels with pride that he is the equal of each of them; but when he comes to view the sum of those like him and places himself at the side of this great body, he is immediately overwhelmed by his own insignificance and his weakness" (409). The pride which the individual citizen feels in his own freedom, negatively understood, turns into despondency when he comes to understand that the achievement of his independence has gone together with the creation of a moral and intellectual authority "the very idea of which aristocratic peoples could not conceive" (409). In other words, just as his thoughts cannot remain truly unbounded, so too his idea

of his own freedom cannot remain purely negative. He will continue to feel the pull of devotion to political authority; the religious instinct which is present in him will re-awaken, but it will take for itself the very object which destroys his sense of his own greatness. In future ages, Tocqueville predicts, "faith in common opinion will become a sort of religion whose prophet will be the majority" (410). Precisely because men in democracy will place intellectual authority "within the limits of humanity, not beyond it" (408), their devotional longings will become attracted to objects which, paradoxically, diminish rather than support the importance of the individual.

This phenomenon, according to Tocqueville, appears to be manifest above all in two developments which are peculiar to the democratic age: the excessive "passion" or "love" for equality which is widespread throughout society in both America and Europe, and the attraction to pantheism which is distinctive of European high culture. To begin with the first of these, Tocqueville rather remarkably insists that he has "no need to say" that the "first and most lively of the passions to which equality of conditions gives birth . . . is the love of this same equality" (479). This fact is so evident that everyone has noticed it: it "has been said a hundred times that our contemporaries have a much more ardent and tenacious love for equality than for freedom," but no one has yet provided a satisfactory explanation as to why this is so (479). To fill this void, Tocqueville provides an account of it that is rooted in the following observation:

> If one wishes to pay attention to it, one will see that in each century one encounters a singular and dominating fact to which all the others are connected; this fact almost always gives rise to a mother idea, or a principal passion, that in the end attracts and carries along in its course all sentiments and all ideas. It is like a great river toward which each of the surrounding streams seems to run (480).

In this revealing yet still obscure passage, Tocqueville seems to indicate that politics in every age is marked by a certain primary fact. But he also suggests, as he did in the introduction, that that "primary fact" is also a "generative fact" (3). It seeks, as it were, to preserve itself, and to do this it shapes and molds human passions so that they take its preservation or advancement for an end. Thus, in democratic ages man's love or passionate desire has been directed towards equality.

> Do not ask what unique charm men in democratic ages find in living as equals, or the particular reasons that they can have for being so obstinately attached to equality rather than to the other goods that society presents to them: equality forms the distinctive characteristic of the period they live in; that alone is enough to explain why they prefer it to all the rest (480).

In the age in which we live, Tocqueville therefore suggests, the longing for eternity which was formerly shaped and directed by religion has taken equality for its object instead. Men in democracy, he says, "do not hold to equality only because it is dear to them; they are also attached to it because they believe that it will last forever" (480). They love equality "with an eternal love" (52), "an ardent, insatiable, eternal, invincible passion" (482), and they consider it the "only . . . good in the whole universe worth longing for" (481).

The French word *égal* can carry a connotation of sameness as well as equality, and throughout the work Tocqueville understands democracy as a social state in which human beings are alike as well as equal: it introduces to the human mind the notion of "those like oneself (*semblables*)" (535-9; Orwin 2000, 142; Mansfield and Winthrop 2000, xlvii). Moreover, as we will soon see, it tends to make variety disappear from the human species (588). Democracy's tendency to instill a passionate desire for equality in

human beings therefore also leads them to feel an eternal and devotional love for what eradicates human distinctiveness and individuality. It channels the natural human desire to forget oneself not, as in the feudal aristocrat, towards a paradoxical kind of self-affirmation—in which the sacrifice is considered as something which renders one deserving of greatness—but rather towards a more complete and therefore perhaps less confused form of self-abnegation. Men in democracy, according to Tocqueville, love equality so much and in such a way that "nothing can satisfy them without [it]," and "they would sooner consent to perish than lose it" (52). They will "compromise their dearest interests" (481) and perhaps even their lives, to preserve it, and if they cannot get equality in freedom, "they still want it in slavery" (482). Just as they are attracted to equality precisely because of its ability to eradicate human distinctiveness, they are willing to accept slavery because they feel no desire to preserve that authentic self-distinction which Tocqueville regards as part and parcel with freedom. Indeed, they may even be attracted to equality for the promise it holds to destroy liberty thus understood.

This, at any rate, is the suggestion which Tocqueville appears to make in his discussion of pantheism, which he identifies as an intellectual trend which will hold "secret charms" for men living in democracy "although it destroys human individuality, or rather because it destroys it" (426).[179] Tocqueville's brief chapter on pantheism, which may contain his most hostile comments in the entirety of *Democracy in America* towards any particular school of thought, appears to single out Spinozism in particular as

[179] That pantheism constitutes the logical culmination of democracy's natural intellectual drift—and that the deepest sentiments of democratic man therefore tend toward an eradication of human individuality—is

representative of the natural tendency of the democratic mind. Just as he had earlier claimed that the Americans are governed by a "philosophic method," so too he here makes a point of identifying pantheism as a philosophic system (426). But Tocqueville also indicates that, at least in his time, the popularity of pantheism appears to be a distinctly European development, and his discussion of it contains no reference at all to America. In Europe, however, its influence is so strong that the majority of "the works of the imagination published in France . . . either contain some opinions or depictions borrowed from pantheistic doctrines or allow one to perceive a sort of tendency toward these doctrines in their authors" (425). Despite its quasi-religious character, then, pantheism, to Tocqueville, seems to be the clearest visible manifestation of that dominant rationalist 'European' mindset, hostile to religiosity in the ordinary sense, which he associated with the name of Spinoza in Volume I.

On the surface, pantheism would appear to have such a small hold in America for the simple reason that it is a philosophic doctrine, and as Tocqueville has already informed us, the Americans are uniformly indifferent to philosophy. But, just as the Americans practice a reasonable Christianity which eschews the supernatural in favor of what is "within the limits of humanity, not beyond it" (408), it would appear that the fusion of rationalism and religion which pantheism achieves is not so alien to the outlook which Tocqueville discovered to be uniform throughout the United States. In fact, it would even seem accurate to say that pantheism represents the most complete tendency, or the ultimate trajectory, of rationalist religion. After all, Spinoza's teaching that there is

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most successfully shown in Lawler's study (1993, ch. 2). Lawler, however, does not stress the role of

only one substance in the universe, and that that substance is God, would seem to be the logical culmination of the Enlightenment's tendency to promote theologies which equate God with nature. The pantheist goes as far as one can in making God rational and non-mysterious, or in preserving a sense of the divine within a universe governed by impersonal natural necessities—one could say that he stops just short of an embrace of outright materialism. Thus, Tocqueville claims that this philosophic religion will be attractive to men living under democracy precisely because they are obsessed with the "idea of unity" (426). They constantly "aspire to be able to link a multitude of consequences to a single cause" because their social state has taught them to view themselves (and all other things as well) merely as constituent parts of a giant mass. But, as Tocqueville made clear in his chapter on the Americans' philosophic method, that latter tendency is the product of a mindset shaped by Enlightenment rationalism, and so it would seem that pantheism is attractive both because it is itself rationalistic and also because it accords with those non-rational or erotic tendencies to which the Enlightenment gave birth.

As regards the former, Tocqueville claims that the democratic mind is inclined to embrace pantheism because it is bothered by the (irrational and mysterious) separation that is present in traditional theology between the Creator and his creation, "and it willingly seeks to enlarge and simplify its thought by enclosing God and the universe within a single whole" (426). But this reasoned and intellectual preference for consistency and uniformity also has an effect on the human passions, and as Tocqueville

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erotic desire in the attraction to pantheism but emphasizes instead its roots in Rousseauean 'sentiments.'

closes this brief chapter he declares that even though pantheism is ostensibly simply a philosophic system which "seeks to explain the universe," in practice it can be expected "to *seduce* the human mind" (426, emphasis added). The destruction of human individuality which it promises, and which makes it attractive to the democratic mind, therefore appears to be a distinctly pernicious version of *eros*. To speak in Spinoza's terms, the idea that human beings are merely "a particle" of nature may at first become impressed on the mind simply as an idea, and it may do no more than convince men intellectually that they have no exalted status in the cosmos. But this recognition soon transforms itself into a human desire to be nothing, or to lose oneself and one's own individuality in a universe which has been renamed "God." Tocqueville's indirect criticism of Spinoza here, then, would seem to be that he tapped into a naturally occurring desire for self-forgetting which he failed to understand or whose existence he denied—with the result that it took on a form which turned out to be dangerous, especially because, being unrecognized, it was necessarily uncontrolled and undirected.

Tocqueville's estimation of the Enlightenment would therefore seem to be encapsulated in the following thought: that, whether it intended to or not, the modern project created a world in which *eros* or human pride began to turn against itself, and, in effect, to consume itself. But if Tocqueville indicates that the likes of Locke's reasonable Christianity and Spinoza's religion of nature are symptoms of this more general ailment, it is also not so clear from his analysis whether traditional Christian theology can provide much of a remedy. We have already seen that Tocqueville regards Protestantism as

containing the seeds of a more thoroughgoing rationalism,[180] and, once one looks past his somewhat flattering surface presentation, his estimation of Roman Catholicism does not seem to be much better. His chapter on Catholicism in Volume II immediately precedes his chapter on pantheism, and he presents the growth of these two seemingly opposed religious outlooks as part of a single development. While a large number of people in democracy are becoming unbelievers or turning to more naturalistic religions, others are joining the Catholic Church for the same reason that their counterparts are leaving it in favor of outlooks like pantheism: they have "a hidden instinct" which leads them to admire the Church's universal government, and "its great unity attracts them" (424). In Volume I, Tocqueville advertises Catholicism's natural favorability towards democracy, understood, as always, not as a form of government but as "equality of conditions" (276). But the fact that it is naturally amenable to this kind of social state would seem to call into question whether it can really stand up as a bulwark against the natural disadvantages to which that same social state gives birth. Indeed, in this same section Tocqueville writes that the Catholic Church's support for equality goes together with a support for "obedience." "Catholicism is like an absolute monarchy. Remove the prince and conditions are more equal in it than in republics" (276).[181]

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[180] Tocqueville also makes this point in the letter to Kergorlay cited above. Because Protestantism liberated the human spirit, but only half-way, "It seems clear to me that the reformed religion is a kind of compromise, a sort of *representative monarchy* in matters of religion which can well fill an era, serve as the passage from one state to another, but which cannot constitute a definitive state itself and which is approaching its end" (Tocqueville 1985, 49-50, emphasis original). According to Tocqueville, what is often called a mixed government "has always seemed to me to be a chimera" (240).

[181] Given this, it is hard to see how Mitchell can conclude that Tocqueville considered "Roman Catholics . . . to be the best *citizens* of a democracy" (Mitchell 1995, 122, emphasis added).

To be sure, Tocqueville also claims that Catholics in America "are not naturally opposed" to republicanism (276), but to be unopposed to something is not necessarily to be zealously in favor of it. As Tocqueville initially frames this problem, then, it appears to be far from clear whether Catholicism, along with Protestantism, can serve as the basis for a spirited and devotional outlook which can support freedom. The admiration for the Catholic Church's universal government which the lower classes under democracy feel parallels the seductiveness of pantheism, and of its destruction of the importance of the human individual, which attracts the elite.[182] In an important passage to which we will soon return, Tocqueville describes the social conditions that accompanied the birth of Christianity in terms which seem to evoke his predictions for the kind of despotism which democratic peoples have to fear.

> At the moment when the Christian religion appeared on earth, Providence, which was undoubtedly preparing the world for its coming, had united a great part of the human species, like an immense flock, under the scepter of the Caesars. The men who composed that multitude differed much from one another, but they nevertheless had this common point: they all obeyed the same laws; and each of them was so weak and small in relation to the greatness of the prince that they all appeared equal when one came to compare them to him (420).

While Tocqueville here politely attributes this political development to Providence, he also makes quite clear that Christianity, in his view, arose out of conditions that can only be described as despotic and therefore as destructive of the individual's sense of his own greatness. At least certain of its virtues, it would not seem far-fetched to suggest, are those which are always encouraged by absolute governments: especially humility,

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[182] Just as Tocqueville writes in *Democracy in America* that he expects democrats in the future to become divided between unbelief and the Roman Church, he also observes to Kergorlay that the rich and the poor

forgetfulness of injuries, and a lack of political ambition (cf. 485, Tocqueville 1959, 191).[183]

At occasional points in *Democracy in America*, and more explicitly in his letters to Gobineau, Tocqueville seems to endorse the so-called "secularization thesis," the idea that modern, liberal-democratic morality arose when the aims of Christian ethics were somehow brought down to this world.[184] Space will obviously not permit a full discussion of this aspect of Tocqueville's thought, but it may be sufficient to note that both Christian and democratic morality, in his estimation, share one crucial overriding feature: they are both unequivocally hostile to human pride.[185] It is true, of course, that Tocqueville frequently mentions that the Americans feel great pride—pride in themselves, in their freedom, and in their independence. They are, as he writes, "impatient at censure and insatiable for praise. The slimmest eulogy is agreeable to them and the greatest is rarely enough to satisfy them; they pester you at every moment to get you to praise them; and if you resist their entreaties, they praise themselves" (585). But from this constant (and somewhat humorous) badgering for praise Tocqueville draws the

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in America are increasingly drifting towards Unitarianism and Catholicism respectively (Tocqueville 1985, 51-2; cf. also Kessler 1993).

[183] Tocqueville thus quietly seems to voice a similar criticism of Christianity as Rousseau and Machiavelli. The kinship between Christianity and ordinary despotism, however, would appear somewhat limited in light of the latter's tendency to discourage human beings from loving one another (485). Whether Christianity would be more compatible with a soft despotism, whose reduction of men to a herd or a flock has some connection with the rise of pity and compassion in modern society, would seem to be less clear.

[184] As Orwin points out, however, the transformation of Christian charity into the Baconian, "purely worldly" end of relieving man's estate "represents a radical transformation of the original" (2000, 145-6). Tocqueville's exchange with Gobineau is discussed and analyzed in Galston 1992, 220-4 and Tessitore 2005.

[185] This indication, at any rate, is provided by the title of Hobbes's *Leviathan*, the "King of the Proud" (xxviii.27; Job 41:33-4; cf. also xv.21). My reflections on pride in this chapter are heavily indebted to the work of Mansfield and Winthrop, who also note this common feature of both Christianity and modern democracy (2000, xxxii-xxxiii, cf. also lviii-lxvi).

reasonable conclusion that there is something "restive and envious" in the American's pride: unlike the (aristocratic) Englishman, whose pride "has no need of nutriment" but "lives on itself," the American's behavior is indicative of a deep and nagging doubt which he feels about his own merit (585). Thus, as Tocqueville concludes several chapters later, the democratic man who seems so excessively proud at first glance actually "despises himself," for "he believes himself made only to taste vulgar pleasures."

> Therefore, far from believing that one must recommend humility to our contemporaries, I should want one to strive to give them a vaster idea of themselves and of their species; humility is not healthy for them; what they lack most, in my opinion, is pride. I would willingly trade several of our small virtues for this vice (604).

The unhealthy version of the desire for self-forgetting which democracy encourages, and which has at least something in common with both pantheism and Christianity, may in fact reflect a self-hatred arising from a recognition among democrats of their insignificant and vulgar status—a recognition which is all too common in modern democracy because it is also all too reflective of reality. In democracy, where suicide is common (514), men remain in a certain respect above themselves, for the capacity to feel self-disgust indicates that one has not yet become wholly brutalized. But, as Tocqueville will also go on to indicate, even that barrier currently finds itself under threat of being breached: the self-loathing which democrats feel is born of a very real and disturbing sense that they are gradually losing their humanity.

HOW THE TRIUMPH OF HUMANITY ENDANGERS HUMANITY

These considerations on pride occur at the start and the end of a brief sequence of chapters which are devoted to a discussion of honor and ambition in the United States (II.3.16-19). After recording the great sense of spiritual satisfaction which the Americans exhibit outwardly, Tocqueville shows the reader why that outward pride ultimately reveals an inner despondency, and the movement between these two poles is indicative of a problem which effects not only the aspirations of individual democrats, but also of democracy itself. After describing the "stubborn," "jealous," and boastful (586) character of the Americans' national pride in chapter sixteen of part three, Tocqueville next turns to a short discussion of "HOW THE ASPECT OF SOCIETY IN THE UNITED STATES IS AT ONCE AGITATED AND MONOTONOUS" (II.3.17, 587). This innocuously titled chapter begins by conveying the impressions which Tocqueville himself, as a visitor from the old aristocratic societies of Europe, must have felt upon arriving in the thoroughly modern, industrial democracy that is the United States. Saluting those pioneers who bravely struck out into the wilderness to develop and cultivate the American continent, as well as the entrepreneurial spirit of those capitalists who followed in their wake, Tocqueville declares that "nothing is more apt to excite and nourish curiosity than the aspect of the United States." Here everything seems to "vary constantly," and one could "say that unmoving nature itself is moving, so much is it transformed daily by the hand of man" (587). The traveler who witnesses such a novel movement cannot but be excited by this tumult, and his excitement would also seem to echo the great hopes, and the expectation of a better future, which animated the original architects of this society. For

those authors and statesmen who brought it into being, the Enlightenment project to conquer nature for the relief of man's estate had the character of a grand and noble experiment—it understood itself as devoted to a goal whose ambitions were unprecedented in human history, and, like Nathaniel Morton and his followers, those who were instrumental in its success could claim a few truly deserved rays of glory for themselves.

According to Tocqueville, however, while this experiment may have been exciting and glorious to those who were fighting for it on the front lines, now that the dust has settled and it has finally been completed, the results are far from remarkable. "In the long term . . . the sight of such an agitated society appears monotonous, and after having contemplated this picture of such movement for some time, the spectator gets bored" (587). The Enlightenment and the Revolution were driven, of course, by a desire to overturn the inequality which was the defining feature of the old aristocratic societies. To raise the overall condition of mankind by eradicating those feudal institutions that prevented him from attaining his most basic needs was not only a noble goal, it was one which Tocqueville will identify in the next chapter as the very essence of justice. But the same aristocratic hierarchy which forced each man to remain "nearly fixed in his sphere," according to Tocqueville, also produced a rich diversity of "passions, ideas, habits, and tastes"—for the great distance that existed between classes under the Old Regime made men "prodigiously unalike" (587). Now that democracy has broken down these ancient barriers, this diversity has given way to an unprecedented uniformity: "all men are alike and do things that are nearly alike." Individually, of course, they "are subject . . . to great

and continual vicissitudes," but when this is considered from a distance, "the name of the actors alone is different, the play is the same" (587).

In aristocratic centuries society was stagnant—which is to say that, the luxury of a few notwithstanding, by modern standards it was wretchedly poor. In today's capitalist democracies, by contrast, society is prosperous because it is agitated and permeated with competition, but the uniform character of that competition makes the excitement which it produces seem very boring once it is glimpsed from a bird's eye view. In aristocracies, the members of one class had no experience of material well-being and were therefore "not familiar enough with it to desire it" (507), while those of the other, accustomed to such comfort from birth, turned their attention exclusively to "some more difficult and greater undertaking" (506). Because this latter class was "placed in a permanent and hereditary manner above the crowd," it naturally conceived "a high-minded idea of itself and of man." Without the need to think about providing for its well-being, its members could imagine a diverse set of "glorious enjoyments" and fix their efforts on more "magnificent goals" (436). In democracy, however, when ranks are confused and wealth is open to all, "birth, condition, and profession no longer distinguish men," and "there remains scarcely anything but money that creates very visible differences between them and that can set off some from their peers" (587). The Americans therefore pour all their efforts into the pursuit of wealth and to ostentatious displays of it (586) because that is the only means remaining to them of asserting their status and their dignity over and against their fellow citizens. There is only one kind of ambition among citizens in a democracy, and that is the desire to grow rich: "Men who live in democratic times have

many passions; but most of their passions end in love of wealth or issue from it" (587). This gives them all "a family resemblance, and it is not slow to create a tiresome picture" (588).

Remarkably, Tocqueville thus suggests that the reason why the Americans devote themselves entirely to the pursuit of material well-being is not itself materialistic. He makes a point of informing the reader that their preoccupation with money arises not because "their souls are smaller" but simply because money is much more important in the United States than it has ever been anywhere else (587). Their sense of pride, honor, and ambition is just as vibrant as among other peoples, but in an egalitarian society it is simply a troubling fact that the desire for distinction and recognition must necessarily be channeled in a commercial direction. But since the result of this is a society unprecedentedly uniform in its passions and sentiments, it would also appear fair to say that the longing for distinction under democracy produces nothing of the sort. Tocqueville thus indicates that there is a fundamental tension in every society between diversity and equality, and he claims that America's resolution of this tension in the latter's favor is also indicative of a trend which is quickly leaving its mark on "almost all men of our day" (588).

> Variety is disappearing from within the human species; the same manner of acting, thinking, and feeling is found in all the corners of the world. That comes not only from the fact that all peoples deal with each other more and copy each other more faithfully, but from the fact that in each country, men diverge further and further from the particular ideas and sentiments of a caste, a profession, or a family and simultaneously arrive at what depends more nearly on the constitution of man, which is everywhere the same (588).

To take Tocqueville's words in their most literal sense, the ascendancy of democracy and the collapse of aristocratic inequality have brought to the fore that which all men most obviously have in common according to nature: the body. The immaterial virtues of the feudal aristocrat had called for holding the body in contempt, but because this contempt was rooted in a sense of dignity that was held to be appropriate only to the members of a certain class, those virtues can have only a very precarious place under liberal-democracy, which embodies the triumph of a newly discovered and fundamentally egalitarian conception of human nature. Here as elsewhere, Tocqueville gives his endorsement to the liberal notion of human equality, and he claims that the coming 'Americanization' of the world is inevitable because human nature demands it. Like travelers lost in a forest "in which all the paths end at the same point, . . . [all] peoples who take for the object of their studies and imitation, not such and such a man, but man himself, will in the end encounter each other in the same mores" (588). But if the spread of America's way of life represents the triumph of justice, it also represents that of monotony and the decline of all those immaterial sentiments which Tocqueville calls human greatness, and so it is hard to believe that his understanding of human nature can be *simply* egalitarian.

Now, this tension between equality and greatness, between the justice which the Enlightenment achieved and the threat to human excellence which it engendered, is of course the guiding problem of the entirety of *Democracy in America*. But Tocqueville's treatment of it in the following chapter, "ON HONOR IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN DEMOCRATIC SOCIETIES" (589), seems to hold special significance, for he there

articulates the cause of this tension between justice and greatness through an account of the roots of human moral psychology as a whole. Tocqueville begins this chapter by noting that

> It seems that men make use of two very distinct methods in the public judgment that they bring to the actions of those like them: sometimes they judge them according to the simple notions of the just and the unjust that are widespread over all the earth; sometimes they appraise them with the aid of very particular notions that belong only to one country and one period (589).

The first of these methods of judgment (which Tocqueville terms 'justice') is born in response to the "permanent and general needs" which the human race feels "in all places and at all times," while the second (which he names 'honor') reflects the specific needs of "more restricted associations"—of particular nations, of castes that reside within nations, and even of those numerous small associations and sub-castes which made up the intricate patchwork of social relations that existed in aristocratic society (589). While justice may therefore represent the demands of nature and honor those of convention, Tocqueville also suggests that it is not quite sufficient to reduce moral psychology to this simple dichotomy, for in every human being these conflicting moral sentiments are always in some way intertwined with one another, but at the same time, they are always somehow distinct. "Often it happens that these two rules differ; sometimes they combat each other; but they are never entirely confused with one another, nor do they ever destroy each other" (589). Since there is always a tension in the soul between nature and convention, and since neither can ever be simply victorious over the other, Tocqueville's thought would seem to be that humans by nature are conventional beings, at least in part. Every human being must live within a particular society, which must in turn have a

particular moral code which is instrumental for its survival but which is also almost certain to conflict with the general interests of humanity. In this sense conventions can be said to be 'natural,' but since human beings always feel the pull of justice as well, their nature will always be more or less deeply divided against itself. When "men submit without hesitation and without murmur" to the requirements of honor, for example, "they still feel, by a sort of obscure but powerful instinct, that there exists a more general, older, and more holy law which they sometimes disobey without ceasing to recognize" (589).

According to Tocqueville, this holy law reflecting the general needs of the human race has "naturally" given birth among "all men" to certain ideas of "blame and shame:" to evade these needs has been called "*to do evil*," while to submit to them has been called "*to do good*" (589, emphasis original). But Tocqueville also says that what he calls justice or "simple virtue" "lives on itself and is satisfied with its own witness" (598), and so it would appear that these ideas of blame and shame do not exist in order to provide extrinsic support for actions which a clear-sighted person might not find to be good for their own sake. Rather, Tocqueville also associates justice with the demands of reason (594, 598), and the sole example of this "holy law" which he gives in this chapter is the prohibition against homicide (590). That the praise and blame associated with justice is "natural" and necessary means that it is not conventional; men apparently feel no need to endow justice with extra rewards or with notions of glory that make it more attractive. Because it simply reflects the natural needs of humanity—the material and bodily necessities that must be met in order for human beings simply to live—it does not demand great devotions but limits itself instead to outlining a set of simple instructions

which it is in the interest of *all* to follow: it clearly benefits both oneself and one's neighbor if neither has to fear being killed by the other. Moreover, because justice is universal, in theory at least it does not require sacrifice—if men could ever come to take their moral bearings solely from the collective self-interest of the human race, there would be no cause for conflict and therefore no need for self-overcoming as well.

But if the demands of justice are largely free of ambiguity, it is not so with honor. Honor, as Tocqueville notes at the outset of this chapter, usually carries two meanings: it signifies both the glory or the esteem that one can win as a result of carrying out a certain act, as well as "the sum of the rules with the aid of which one obtains this glory" or esteem. Tocqueville claims that in writing this chapter he has always taken the word 'honor' in the latter sense (589 n.1), but it is curious that in his account these two meanings never actually seem to be entirely divorced—for the rules of honor by which one gains esteem always demand great sacrifices, and those sacrifices are always accompanied by the prospect that one can 'win honor' by undertaking them.[186] Since codes of honor exist to serve the interests of particular groups which are set off from, or elevated above, the rest of humanity, it should not be surprising that they frequently stress certain martial virtues. The Romans, for example, whose polity "was formed for the conquest of the world," made the words in their language for "virtue" and for "valor" literally synonymous (593). Similarly, the code of honor of the medieval European aristocracy—"the most extraordinary species of honor that has ever appeared in the world"—was constructed to facilitate the needs of a warrior nobility which "formed a

separate body amidst the people" (590). To maintain its superior social position, "it had to have virtues and vices for its use" (590), and it therefore needed particularly to honor what Tocqueville calls "the virtues that have greatness and luster and that can be readily combined with pride and love of power" (591). Born "of war and for war" (591), it needed to preserve its rule by esteeming above all else great military courage and loyalty to one's superior. Thus, "it imperiously commanded men to overcome themselves, it ordered the forgetting of oneself" (591) in battle and the sacrifice of one's life out of loyalty to one's lord (592).

Because every association has "special interests" (593) which conflict with those of other associations—to say nothing of humanity as a whole—to maintain their position they must always ask their members to take risks and overcome themselves for the sake of this narrowly-construed common good. Even the Americans, who honor commerce rather than war, esteem those who "brave the furies of the ocean to arrive sooner at port" or "tolerate without complaint the miseries of the wilderness" (595). In other words, all codes of honor praise—and thus call good—actions which are in reality bad for an individual but good for the group. This may be what Tocqueville has in mind when he says that they all contain maxims that are "incoherent and . . . bizarre" (591), for if an individual were clear-sighted and knew that his actions only aimed at the good of his group, he might question why he should sacrifice his own good—and his own life—for its sake. Unaware of this problem, he thinks simultaneously that he renounces his own good for that of his group and that, in so doing, he acquires some good of his own in the

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[186] Koritansky (1986, 136) similarly notes that honor must always carry both of these meanings, but he

form of honor. As Tocqueville writes, members of aristocracies perceive their code of conduct as "the distinctive feature of their physiognomy; they apply its different rules"—including those mandating self-sacrifice—"with all the ardor of personal interest and, if I can express myself so, they put passion into obeying it" (597). According to Tocqueville, it was precisely this tension-ridden sentiment that provided the moral foundation of those magnificent and difficult undertakings that were characteristic of life under aristocracy. It allowed those who were born into an elevated position to put on display what he calls "the virtues that have greatness and luster" (591), those grandiose and admirable acts of self-overcoming "that often dazzle, but still more often bring trouble in society" (594).

The somewhat uncomfortable truth that Tocqueville points to here, then, is that what he calls human greatness necessarily accompanies the presence of violence and inequality. Moreover, the reverse of this is also true: as the class distinctions that gave birth to these rules of honor begin to break down, society can be expected to become more orderly, more rational, more pacific, and more in touch with those natural needs of humanity whose procurement does not require outstanding acts of willful self-assertion and self-sacrifice. The "complete and detailed code" (597) of honor that was found in the Middle Ages resulted from the fact that the lines between ranks were clearly delineated, but as these distinctions begin to blur, the rules of honor will become "less numerous" and more vague. They will be "limited to a few precepts," and these "will be less and less distant from the moral laws adopted by common humanity" (596). The Americans in the 19th century—who have no hostile neighbors—still have a sense of honor, but since it

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does not stress its sacrificial element.

casts blame on the warlike virtues of the Middle Ages (594), one could say that it is closer to justice than the moral outlook of the feudal aristocracy. Their code of honor praises the courage that is necessary to conquer nature and settle the wilderness, but "the wildernesses are filling up" (298), and so it would seem that its days too are numbered. As the frontier closes and modernity settles in, honor can be expected to approach more and more those "simple and general notions of good and evil" (599) that reflect the most basic, natural needs of mankind. And as Tocqueville previously suggested, this development will likely be accompanied by a gradual breaking-down of national barriers. As "all the peoples of the world . . . come to the point of having the same interests and the same needs" (599), a version of what is now called the Democratic Peace will be established. Borders will reflect political and administrative divisions rather than national and cultural ones, and a cosmopolitan society which understands itself as devoted to the procurement of the most simple and basic—which is to say, bodily—human needs will look upon martial virtue as the Americans already do: as a "blind and barbaric fury" (594) that is now safely consigned to the realm of history. In Tocqueville's predicted future, in other words, society will be more peaceful but souls really will be smaller, for as morality becomes less complex, less confused, more rationalized, and more reflective of the need simply to preserve human life, those great but ultimately confused longings for distinction and self-affirmation that were present under aristocracy will fade into oblivion.

Now of course, in Volume I Tocqueville had suggested that the presence of these longings is what distinguishes humans from the other beings, and at the opening of this

chapter on honor he claimed that mankind could never live by justice alone. The conclusion of this chapter then, would seem necessarily to point to the possibility that humanity itself may be coming under threat. Indeed, as Tocqueville now turns to a discussion of the precarious place of ambition within liberal-democracy, he seems to make clear the danger of just such a nightmare scenario. He opens this chapter by reflecting on a seemingly strange spectacle that is present in America: in spite of the fact that there are no obstacles in the United States "that would limit desires and prevent them from soaring in all directions" (599), one can scarcely encounter there anything resembling those truly grand ambitions that were found under aristocracy. Americans are universally "devoured by the desire to rise, but one sees almost none of them who appear to nourish vast hopes or to aim very high. All want constantly to acquire goods, reputation, power; few envision all these things on a grand scale" (599). This strange discordance between the large number of ambitions and their ultimately petty aims is of course especially striking because it seems to undercut the hopes which are most commonly associated with liberal-democracy—a kind of polity which, in Spinoza's thought, was supposed to be populated by citizens self-consciously pursuing what they thought of as the *summum bonum*.

But Spinoza and the other architects of liberalism lived under aristocracy, and so Tocqueville suggests that it is not surprising that their thought, and that of the revolutionary generation that followed them, should have been animated by truly grand hopes for what liberal-democracy could accomplish. When equality was established in France, he writes, ambitions bloomed there "almost without limit," but this was because

at that moment the door to "a long-envied greatness" had finally opened (600). Indeed, in every "revolution that overturns an aristocracy," "nothing seems impossible to anyone," and desires become boundless precisely because the spirit of the aristocracy then "drifts over the mass." The people who have lived under its laws, who have "seen its splendors," and have allowed themselves, "without knowing it, to be pervaded with the sentiments and ideas that it had conceived," now undertake great efforts to satisfy these passions that have always lay dormant within them (600). But if this is the greatest instance of aristocratic passion, it is also the last one, and indeed, it is the only instance in which all of these great longings are made truly accessible to all. As the revolutionary generation dies and the last "remains of aristocracy finally disappear," one "forgets the great events that accompanied its fall." As "repose succeeds war, the empire of rules reigns within the new world" (600).

The revolution that overturns an aristocracy might therefore be compared to a war to end all wars—something which, for a lover of battles and a seeker after glory, would almost certainly entail the greatest opportunity and the greatest disappointment. For once this greatest and most fulfilling struggle has been waged successfully, such grand passions no longer have a place. Instead, when a democracy reaches its "permanent and normal state" (601), equality both unleashes and limits ambition. It "gives some resources to all" but "very extensive resources" to none, and this causes citizens to recognize that since they "cannot habitually aim very high," they must focus all their energies on "coveting [the] petty objects" that are within their reach (601). Thus, what "above all turns men of democracies away from great ambition is not the smallness of

their fortune, but the violent effort they make every day to pursue it. They compel the soul to employ all its strength in doing mediocre things—which cannot fail soon to limit its view and circumscribe its power" (601). What Tocqueville thus suggests is that among democratic peoples ambitions can be expected to turn in on themselves and thus in effect to destroy themselves. Like the American sailor whom Tocqueville described in Volume I, men in democratic times can be expected to put the violent and restive efforts of the soul in the service of the pursuit of the goods of the body—which will lead in the short run to the disappearance of immaterial longings, and which may also in time threaten the existence of even those few, low-aiming, passions that remain.

Now, to be sure, at several points in *Democracy in America* Tocqueville insists that the comfort and preservation of the body requires, and will therefore lead to, the cultivation of the soul. He suggests, for example, that no prosperous people has existed that is not also a free people (514-5), that the practical part of the sciences depends upon the purely theoretical part (434), and, in short, that in men "the angel teaches the brute the art of satisfying itself" (521). But Tocqueville also provides contrary suggestions—which leads one to suspect that these former claims are intended to convince democrats, by speaking to them on their own terms, of the need to pay attention to the improvement of their souls. He claims that in China, "where equality of conditions is very great and very old" (602), the progress of the sciences, and indeed, of civilization itself, eventually reached a point where it simply came to a stop. In this orderly and administrative state, human knowledge dried up, but "material well-being" remained present; society was peaceful, revolutions "were very rare, and war was so to speak unknown" (438-9).

Tocqueville's description of China therefore seems to foreshadow his later prediction of the soft despotism which democratic nations have to fear. It shows that a civilization which is not overrun by barbarians can still die a peaceful death (439), because it may be possible after all for a centrally-organized administrative state to provide human beings with the material well-being which they covet.[187]

Unfortunately, according to Tocqueville, the dimming of ambitions that occurs once democracy establishes itself prepares the way for just such a possibility. As the great aristocratic passions die out, they can be expected to be replaced by a rational standard that imposes a set of uniform rules on the great mass of individuals.

> In a democratic society, as elsewhere, there are only a certain number of great fortunes to be made; and as the careers that lead to them are open indiscriminately to each citizen, the progress of all must be slowed. As the candidates appear nearly similar, and as it is difficult to make a choice among them without violating the principle of equality, which is the supreme law of democratic societies, the first idea that presents itself is to make all advance at the same pace and to subject all to the same tests (602).

In such an atmosphere, "youth is lost and . . . imagination [is] extinguished;" the longings for greatness that from time to time naturally appear in the young and ambitious are boxed in until they suffocate (602). The result is a collection of individuals who are as uninspired and un-erotic as the hero of a Chinese novel who "touches the heart of his mistress by passing an examination well. Great ambitions breathe uneasily in such an atmosphere" (602).

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[187] Cf. Tocqueville's description of a 'soft despotism' at the end of the work. Such a state provides for citizens' security, "foresees and secures their needs, facilitates their pleasures, conducts their principal affairs, directs their industry, regulates their estates, divides their inheritances; can it not take away from them entirely the trouble of thinking and the pain of living" (663)?

If the paucity of ambition under democracy seems to forebode the eventual dimming, and even the virtual eradication of human *eros*, then, it would also appear to be the case that even those extremely "great ambitions" which do arise from time to time "despite these natural obstacles" suffer from a similar problem. Tocqueville claims that when grander ambitions are found under democracy, the destruction of the institutional restraints which were present under aristocracy renders them more dangerous and gives them a more "violent and revolutionary character" than existed in these former ages (603). But although "they believe they can dare all," even to the point of overturning the state, the longings of those who possess such ambitions nevertheless remain decisively shaped by the democratic society in which they came of age. Their passions are tinged with "very vulgar tastes" and mores, and so they tend to desire not glory but only the power that is necessary to make others obey. Or rather, they seek power "only to procure small and coarse pleasures [for themselves] more easily" (603). But although Tocqueville does predict that this kind of ambition will pose a danger for a healthy democracy, he closes this chapter by conceding that the paucity of democratic ambition remains his main concern: "for democratic societies I dread the audacity much less than the mediocrity of desires" (604).

Since both of these dangers, after all, are rooted in the threat which equality poses to human passions, one of the most important tasks of "the heads of these new societies"—of the democratic legislator who has been instructed by Tocqueville's political science—must be to preserve some sense of those grand, immaterial desires that characterized aristocracy. To re-instill democratic citizens with a genuine sense of pride,

it will be "good to give them difficult and perilous affairs . . . in order to elevate ambition and to open a theater for it" (604). Although such projects could likely to take peaceful forms as well, it would seem very likely that Tocqueville is here referring to war (and perhaps also to imperialism). War, after all, was the necessary condition for what Tocqueville in the previous chapter called the "virtues that . . . dazzle" (594). And as he states a few chapters later, "war almost always enlarges the thought of a people and elevates its heart. There are cases where only it can arrest the excessive development of certain penchants that equality naturally gives rise to, and where, for certain deep-seated maladies to which democratic societies are subject, it must be considered almost necessary" (620-1).[188] As Tocqueville made clear in his chapter on honor, those maladies include a forgetting of the notion of self-sacrifice and the ascendency of a purely 'rationalistic' outlook which inclines citizens to concern themselves solely with the goods of the body and with the pursuit of material well-being. The belief of democratic citizens that they are suited to nothing immaterial, and that they are "made only to taste vulgar pleasures" (604), is at the root of their self-hatred—as we will see more clearly below, it is beginning to convince them that they are descending to the level of the animals. Thus, war and other grand projects can re-instill a healthy sense of pride in democrats because

[188] It is passages such as these which provoke Banfield's opposition to "the illiberal Tocqueville" (Banfield 1991, ch. 3). In light of contemporary sentiments, this criticism is understandable, and certainly there is no aspect of Tocqueville's thought that is more jarring to modern ears than his gentlemanly praise of war. But Banfield's confident statement that "we [now] know" that individualism and materialism "need not destroy . . . public virtue" (p. 52) is arguably not so self-evidently true. Tocqueville's call for a re-awakening of patriotism and public-spiritedness is intended to show democracy that it faces a problem that perhaps cannot be so easily solved—but he is confident that this advice will not be taken too harshly because he speaks as a friend of liberty. Because Tocqueville does speak as a partisan of individual freedom, Banfield's characterization of his thought as "reminiscent of Robespierre" (p. 49) almost certainly goes too far. For a more measured view, see Koritansky 1986, 141.

they will also help to preserve those distinctly human notions of self-contempt and self-overcoming which gave the deeds of the feudal aristocrat so much "greatness and luster" (591). But as Tocqueville also made clear in his discussion of honor, the idea of sacrifice will always be accompanied by that of recompense, and, as he states in another place, "there are a great number of sacrifices that can find their recompense only in the other world" (504). Thus, in order to retain some remnant of those tension-ridden but ultimately resplendent longings which were widespread under aristocracy but which democracy endangers, it will be necessary first and foremost to preserve what Tocqueville calls "the most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries," namely religion (519).

TOCQUEVILLE'S RELIGIOUS PROJECT

In Volume I Tocqueville had emphasized the importance of religion for the health of republicanism in America, and although he had stressed there that belief remains strong in the United States because man has a natural longing for immortality, he also quietly indicated that that longing is not quite as robust in America as he appears to suggest. Indeed, as Tocqueville goes on in Volume II to describe the pathologies afflicting the democratic soul, he confirms this latter suggestion, and he indicates how it has come about that the human desire for the eternal is now under threat, and thus why it is that what "ought to be, in our day, *the natural state* of men in the matter of religion" (286, emphasis original) has not in fact come to be established. The restiveness which

the Americans feel in the midst of their well-being, and more importantly, their ever-increasing self-hatred in a society which directs them exclusively to the pursuit of the goods of the body, are signs of the "moral violence" (284) that modernity has committed against human nature. In a possible allusion to the Enlightenment's project, Tocqueville associates the notion "of vanquishing and outwitting nature" with aristocracy (509). The original idea of modernity was conceived in a society in which great passions led the most outstanding human beings to conceive of the kind of grand projects whose existence is now imperiled (523). Even when these took a material form, they were still grandiose, and one can say that they therefore were still products more of the soul than of the body. Such was the case with the Enlightenment, but now that the latter's conquest of nature has succeeded, it is no longer a question "of depleting the universe in order better to satiate the passions of man; it is about adding a few toises to one's fields, planting an orchard, enlarging a residence, making life easier and more comfortable at each instant, preventing inconvenience, and satisfying the least needs without effort and almost without cost" (509). Because "the soul clings" to these small efforts, it allows them to be placed "between it and God." It risks forgetting the idea of devotion and sacrifice, and of the immortality that can be attained through them, and it concentrates its efforts instead on the more straightforward and clear-sighted pursuit of the material. "Thus there could well be established in the world a sort of honest materialism that does not corrupt souls, but softens them and in the end quietly loosens all their tensions" (509).[189]

[189] The word *ressorts* here is more literally (and commonly) translated as "springs of action" (cf. Tocqueville 2010, 938) but Mansfield and Winthrop's choice of "tensions" seems to capture how

In Volume I Tocqueville had claimed that what distinguishes man from the other animals is a tension-ridden (but single) desire which combines self-disgust and self-affirmation. Similarly, in Volume II he identifies two things that separate us from the beasts: the belief in the possibility of self-perfection (427), and the capacity for self-sacrifice (521-2).[190] The easing of tensions which democratic materialism brings about therefore also threatens the existence of what is distinctly human: materialism in the ordinary sense places the soul in jeopardy because it encourages the acceptance of materialism in the philosophic sense. Tocqueville writes that if he had lived in an aristocracy he would have attempted to direct "the human mind toward physical studies," but he cautions that in the times in which we live, excessive pre-occupation with the physical may lead man finally to "degrade himself" (518-9). He cautions that the excessive taste for material enjoyments that characterizes democratic life can be expected to dispose human beings to think that "all is nothing but matter." Those who believe that there is nothing spiritual will understandably turn their exclusive attention to material enjoyments, which they will pursue "with an insane ardor. Such is the fatal circle into which democratic nations are propelled" (519).

To combat this danger, Tocqueville calls upon the democratic "legislator" to utilize his "art," which "consists in discerning well and in advance the natural inclinations of human societies" in order to know when to assist and when to restrain them (518).

Tocqueville understands the complicated and paradoxical psychological basis of what he calls the "precious goods that make for the glory and the greatness of the human species" (509).

[190] In the first passage referred to, Tocqueville states that the endeavor to perfect oneself is the only thing that distinguishes man from the animals, which, when taken with his subsequent statement about the distinctly human character of self-sacrifice, would seem to suggest that these are in fact two aspects of the same, single longing.

Examining the characteristics of human societies as they fluctuate according "to time and place" (7), the new political science, armed with Tocqueville's insights into the needs of the soul, will attempt to address those permanent requirements of human nature as they present themselves in specific, historically contingent ways. If he had lived centuries earlier, Tocqueville may have encouraged the weakening of religious beliefs—at least to a certain extent—but in the materialistic age in which we live his advice is unequivocal: "Legislators of democracies and all honest and enlightened men" must "apply themselves relentlessly to raising up souls and keeping them turned toward Heaven" (519). Qualifying to a considerable extent his statements in Volume I about the omnipotence of the majority and the weakness of democratic governments, he now seems to indicate that "philosophers and those who govern" (523) can influence the sovereign power of public opinion, at least to a limited extent. But those limitations would seem to be expansive enough to permit certain unnamed individuals "who are interested in the future of democratic societies" to spread within them "a taste for the infinite, a sentiment of greatness, and a love of immaterial pleasures" (519). To this end, the most important task of those who answer Tocqueville's call will be to combat, as "the natural enemies" of a democratic people, all those who profess "those harmful theories that tend to make it believed that everything perishes with the body" (519).

Now, Tocqueville's advice to this newly empowered group of democratic legislators is famously—or perhaps infamously—low-aiming. He tells them that they must work to promote a belief—any belief—in something immaterial, and that they can

do this only by acting as if they believe, even if they do not (521).[191] "Surely," he writes, "metempsychosis is not more reasonable than materialism," but "if a democracy absolutely had to make a choice between the two . . . I would judge that its citizens risk brutalizing themselves less by thinking that their soul is going to pass into the body of a pig than in believing it is nothing" (519-20). Tocqueville here seems most obviously to suggest that even though metempsychosis and materialism are equally false and absurd (cf. 418), because the former endows men with at least a semblance of pride and a longer view of things, it contains something salutary. But Tocqueville's claim that it is "not more reasonable" than materialism may also imply of these two beliefs materialism is the more rational. Unassisted reason, he may be suggesting, can not teach us that there is a soul or that it is immortal; left to its own lights, the human mind can conclude only that the universe, mankind included, is composed solely of matter. Materialism would therefore seem to be the logical endpoint of that craving for unity and rationality which attracts the democratic mind to pantheism. In opposing it, Tocqueville seems to speak, if not as a defender of unreason, then at least as a proponent of the Pascalian position that reason unassisted is capable only of discovering its own limitations. As we will see more clearly below, however, Tocqueville critiques this very position elsewhere in *Democracy in America*, and he here associates his own view not with Pascal—whose absence here is

[191] Interestingly, Tocqueville predicts that this latter piece of advice will harm him "in the eyes of politicians," not of the pious. Given the thrust of this chapter, his suggestion may be that this is a somewhat desperate remedy born of the fact that, for all politically relevant purposes, there are no more pious. The only way to re-instill a semblance of genuine religiosity in citizens is therefore to have governments "teach" them to know, love, and respect religion by their actions (521).

notable, given the many references to him throughout the work—but with the "philosophy" of Socrates and Plato (520).

According to Tocqueville, that materialism is in fact not so 'reasonable' after all is evident from a plain contradiction that can be found in the works of those thinkers who espouse it. Although "their system could be of some utility to man" if it could give "him a modest idea of himself, . . . they do not make anyone else see that this should be so; and when they believe they have sufficiently established that they are only brutes, they show themselves as proud as if they had demonstrated they were gods" (519). The self-contradiction of the materialists seems to characterize the philosopher as Spinoza conceives of him, someone who takes great pride in achieving a *finis ultimus* that consists in recognizing that man can never be more than a mere particle of nature. To the extent that the thinkers of the Enlightenment tended to promote an ultimately materialistic view of man, Tocqueville seems to suggest, they found themselves unable to give an account of their own way of life. Not unreasonably, Spinoza claimed an exalted dignity for the manner of existence characteristic of the philosopher, but that dignity was founded on a paradoxical—Tocqueville might say incoherent—recognition that neither the universe nor the human soul supports such a thing in any way. In contrast to the materialists, "It is not certain that Socrates and his school had decided opinions about what would happen to man in the other life; but the sole belief on which they were settled, that the soul has nothing in common with the body and that it survives it, was enough to give Platonic philosophy the sort of sublime spark that distinguishes it" (520).

Notably, here as elsewhere in *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville does not claim in his own name to believe that the soul survives the body. Instead, what he most highly praises about the Socratic school concerns not so much what its members apparently believed about the other life, but instead the rhetorical effect which their profession of this belief produced.

> When one reads Plato, one perceives that in the times prior to him, and in his time, many writers existed who extolled materialism. These writers have not come down to us or have come only very incompletely. Thus it has been in almost all centuries: most of the great literary reputations have been joined to spiritualism. The instinct and the taste of the human race sustain this doctrine; they often preserve it despite men themselves, and they make the names of those attached to it persist (520).

In this brief passage, Tocqueville identifies himself not only as having read Plato, but as having learned from him a certain manner of writing appropriate to a historical situation which they both share in common.[192] Like Plato, Tocqueville too is writing at a time when materialism is prevalent, and it may not be too much of an overstatement to suggest that it is the widespread success of a *politicized* form of Epicureanism which accounts in large part for the otherwise vast differences between the worlds in which these two authors lived.[193] Spinoza, it should be recalled, professed admiration for Epicurus and the ancient atomists, and he derided Plato for his spiritualist opinions and for so defaming Democritus that his works were all burned (Spinoza 1995, 279). By drawing attention to a rhetorical task which he shares with Plato—the same rhetorical task which succeeded in ensuring that the works of the Greek materialists failed to survive—Tocqueville also

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[192] For Tocqueville's Platonic manner of writing, see Lawler 1993, 96. Lawler, however, does not find a substantive similarity between Tocqueville and the Socratics.
[193] Cf. Strauss 1965, 37-52.

indicates his intention to combat, albeit to the limited extent that remains possible, the influence of those "champions of modern civilization" whose stunted understanding of the human soul risks making "man into matter" (11).

But Tocqueville's professed rhetorical alliance with Plato would also seem to reflect a more substantive agreement with him, for as Tocqueville indicates, the tremendous success which Plato achieved in making his name persist was rooted in his awareness of the "instinct and the taste of the human race" (520). In contrast to the modern materialists, whose lack of this awareness is indicated by their failure to recognize and account for their own pride, the work of both Plato and Tocqueville is distinguished by a recognition that the "soul has needs that must be satisfied" and that those needs incline men permanently to a "love of what is immortal." Tocqueville insists that this love, which Plato called *eros*, can be hindered or deformed, but never destroyed (510), and he therefore appears to indicate that the chief defect of modern materialist thought was its failure to recognize this. Although materialism may therefore be completely 'reasonable,' at least in a certain sense, the self-contradiction of the thinkers who espouse it provides powerful evidence that it in their attempt to judge what is irrational and vulgar from the standpoint of what reason teaches, they failed to take seriously and to do justice to the irrational longings that distinguish a truly human soul. In this respect at least, Tocqueville appears to be a proponent of a richer and more complete, Socratic rationalism.

Because the soul has needs that must be satisfied, and because no political arrangement can make those needs disappear, it follows, according to Tocqueville, that

liberal-democracy can ignore them only at its own peril. In a short but important discussion of the "exalted and almost fierce spiritualism" of the Americans, Tocqueville appears to warn that, since contemporary liberalism is rooted in a philosophical tradition that is unaware of the depth of the desire for immortality in human beings, it risks bringing about a ferocious and perhaps uncontrollable eruption of it. Observing what historians have referred to as the Second Great Awakening, Tocqueville describes the "bizarre sects" which have arisen in the American wilderness. "Religious follies," he writes, are common in America, and from time to time they attract whole families who leave their comfortable lives in the East and who, trekking out into the wild, "forget for several days and nights the care of their affairs and even the most pressing needs of the body" (510). Unlike Spinoza, who almost certainly would not expect a liberal-democracy to produce new prophets or claims of divine experiences, Tocqueville here seems to indicate that he would not be surprised by the emergence of a man like Joseph Smith: "I would be surprised if mysticism did not soon make progress in a people uniquely preoccupied with its own well-being" (511). But his assessment of these raw and uncontrolled outbursts of religiosity is almost entirely negative—indeed, he presents these "follies" not so much as a legitimate manifestation of religious desire but as an unpredicted backlash which has been produced by a political order that has given no outlet for more moderate and restrained religious longings. As he writes, if "the minds of the great majority of the human race were ever concentrated on the search for material goods alone, one can expect that an *enormous reaction* would be produced," as "some

men" who were chained too tightly to the goods of the body would "throw themselves head over heels" into a concern for those of the soul (510, emphasis added).[194]

If this is true, then it follows that the classic Enlightenment solution to the problem of fanaticism—that of toleration and the spread of commerce—is likely to increase, rather than diminish, religious zeal. As he writes, "It is said that the persecutions of the emperors and the tortures of the circus peopled the deserts of the Thebaid; but I think that it was rather the delights of Rome and the Epicurean philosophy of Greece." Unlike Locke, for example, who suggests in *The Reasonableness of Christianity* that the rise of religious zealotry is connected to poverty and persecution, Tocqueville insists that the outbreak of religious feeling which occurred around the time of Jesus was in effect created by a Roman regime which, like its American counterpart centuries later, "imprisoned" the human spirit within the limits of materialism (511). Christianity therefore "may have pushed the glorification of the spirit to excessive lengths," as Tocqueville candidly wrote to Gobineau, but it was apparently "swept to [such] spiritual excesses" by the widespread loss of religious faith, and by the tremendous influence of Epicureanism, which occurred as the old pagan religions became discredited without being replaced by anything spiritual (Tocqueville 1959, 206-7). Tocqueville's

[194] As previously mentioned, Tocqueville has often been criticized, not wholly unreasonably, for failing to ascertain that the greatest political danger which would present itself in the century after his own would not be a soft-despotism, but a set of regimes which would surpass all precedents for human cruelty. While it is no doubt true that Tocqueville's prediction of the decline of human passions would seem to sit uneasily with the rise of ideology in the twentieth century, his discussion here of the "enormous reaction" which modern bourgeois materialism was likely to produce would seem to permit one to form a Tocquevillian explanation of the reaction that did occur—even if it did not take an explicitly religious form. Moreover, here as in his chapter on ambition, Tocqueville predicts a twin danger facing democracy: excessive and limitless passion, on the one hand, and the mediocrity of desires, on the other. If these manifest themselves politically as soft despotism and hard despotism respectively, then one could say that these are two

analysis in his chapter on America's exalted spiritualism, in other words, would seem to begin to convey his understanding of how Christianity originated, and why it became so popular so quickly. Like those "bizarre sects" whom Tocqueville observed in the American wilderness, the religion of Jesus was a ferocious, self-abnegating counter-reaction to a political order which had taken selfishness to humanly unacceptable lengths.

As previously indicated, Tocqueville writes at one point that Jesus Christ was the first person ever to teach that men are "naturally alike and equal" (413), and shortly after this he notes that the Roman Empire under which he lived shared many of the potentially unfavorable characteristics of contemporary democracy: the equality of all men before a vast, impersonal state; a sense of isolation and individual weakness (420); and, as we have now seen, the spread of a materialist philosophy that in turn instilled an excessive preoccupation with the enjoyments of the body (511). When these statements are put together, it is easy to see why Tocqueville considers Christianity to be the religion which is most suitable for democratic times. And yet, the fact that so many of Christianity's egalitarian qualities seem to reflect democracy's most dangerous tendencies should give us pause before coming to the conclusion that Tocqueville seeks simply to preserve its influence. Because they crave unity and coherence, Tocqueville writes, men "who are alike and equal" are prone to conceive of "the notion of a single God imposing the same rules on each of them and granting them future happiness at the same price" (420). Since the human mind will always seek to harmonize heaven and earth (275), the same tendency that inclines democratic peoples to centralize political authority and to create an

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manifestations of the same threat: for the inhabitants of a soft despotism are not likely to put up much

administrative "empire of rules" (600) also leads them to worship "a single omnipotent being, dispensing the same laws to each man equally in the same manner" (421)—a Deity who presides over a theological order which appears quite similar to the Chinese-style bureaucracy that threatens to suffocate grand ambitions by stifling human pride.

Analyzing religion once again "from a purely human point of view" (419), Tocqueville thus provides a naturalistic explanation not only for why a religion hostile to human pride first arose and then spread with ferocious rapidity under the Roman Empire, but also for why that same hostility has again become present under the conditions of modern democracy. Now, to be sure, Tocqueville first posits this explanation of "the influence exerted over religious beliefs by the social and political state" merely as a hypothesis, but he then claims that its "proof came after the destruction of the Empire" (420).

> As the Roman world was then shattering, so to speak, into a thousand shards, each nation returned to its former individuality. Inside those nations, ranks were soon graduated to infinity; races were marked out, castes partitioned each nation into several peoples. In the midst of this common effort that seemed to bring human societies to subdivide themselves into as many fragments as it was possible to conceive, Christianity did not lose sight of the principal general ideas it had brought to light. But it nonetheless appeared to lend itself, as much as it could, to the new tendencies arising from the fragmentation of the human species. Men continued to adore one God alone as creator and preserver of all things; but each people, each city, and so to speak each man, believed himself able to obtain some separate privilege and to create for himself particular protectors before the sovereign master. Unable to divide the Divinity, they at least multiplied it and magnified its agents beyond measure; the homage due to angels and saints became an almost idolatrous worship for most Christians, and one could fear a moment might come when the Christian religion would regress to the religions it had defeated (420-1).

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resistance when a hard despotism finally invades.

Tocqueville here suggests that the historical record provides us with the results of a grand experiment that reveals how religious beliefs naturally adapt themselves to different social and political circumstances. At the height of the Middle Ages, when humanity was divided and individuals could form a sense of their own greatness, the Christian commandment against pride became almost a dead letter, and Christianity itself accordingly turned into a kind of crypto-paganism. At the same time, however, Christianity "did not lose sight of the principal general ideas it had brought to light": it reigned as a democratic inheritance from the age which had preceded it, and, as Tocqueville indicated in the introduction, it was able to hold in check—if only to a limited extent—some of the more pernicious inegalitarian tendencies of aristocracy. Conversely, it would appear that when Tocqueville calls for "religion" to be preserved "as the most precious inheritance from aristocratic centuries" (519), he is referring not to the original Christianity of the time of Jesus, but to the individualistic and prideful brand of piety that was dominant in the almost un-Christian Middle Ages.

Now of course, as Tocqueville also makes clear, the capacity to instill such beliefs in democratic times will be extremely limited. One could say that, if Tocqueville has his way, religion in the future will be ninety nine percent democratic and only one percent aristocratic, but it is precisely by conceding that ninety nine percent that it will be able to establish the one percent that is critical for retaining some conception of human individuality in times of equality. Thus, when Tocqueville gives some practical suggestions to those who are in charge of regulating religions in democratic centuries, he instructs them to make sure not to alienate the faithful by breaking from the tendencies of

their age, but he presents these concessions as steps which can help to ensure that democrats accept at least a minimally aristocratic brand of piety. He cautions them to be mindful of the ultra-monotheistic tendencies of democrats and not to allow the worship of secondary agents to be confused with that due to the Creator; he warns them "not to struggle unnecessarily" against the hostility to religious forms and ceremonies which arises from the democratic "philosophic method" (421); and most importantly, he advises them not to seek to destroy the "mother passion" of democratic times—the love of material well-being (422). In each of these cases, Tocqueville informs the legislators of the new societies of what they must do to ensure that they do not simply alienate their audience, for if one attempts to steer democratic citizens away from the beliefs that they already accept, it is to be feared that in jumping from one faith to another they will fall into an abyss of materialism (518). The caretakers of democratic religion must therefore be sure to please the majority "in all that is not contrary to faith" (423), but this last qualification is important. Speaking for the moment as a partisan of aristocratic religiosity, Tocqueville claims to "believe firmly in the necessity of forms" (421). Because ceremonies "fix the mind in the contemplation of abstract truths," they help to preserve "the dogma" which is the core of all religions, but if they are multiplied beyond measure they will only serve to create an unbelieving democratic multitude (421-2). Similarly, although religion in the future should not seek to destroy the passion for material well-being, it can still "purify, regulate, *and restrain* the too ardent and too exclusive taste" for it which men feel in times of equality (422, emphasis added).

Tocqueville, of course, never informs the reader what his personal religious beliefs are. He does acknowledge, however, that if he had lived in an aristocratic century he would have written a very different book (518), and he also claims that there is no such thing as a general idea, strictly speaking: "because there are no beings in nature exactly alike," there are also "no identical facts" and "*no rules indiscriminately applicable in the same manner to several objects at once"* (411, emphasis added). This latter statement, which goes together with his declaration in the introduction that "there is almost never any absolute good in the laws" (13), suggests that Tocqueville's guiding intentions are pragmatic—as someone who seeks to see not differently, but further than the parties, he seeks to promote not what is democratic or aristocratic per se, but instead to pursue the good that can be found when a balance is established between them. Since he is writing in a time when democracy threatens to eradicate human greatness, he seeks to encourage religious belief because of its capacity to restrain the commercialism which constitutes the chief element of that threat. Thus, although American religion applauds the progress of industry and speaks frequently of the cares of this world, Tocqueville cautions that it has not (yet) become a mere theological rubber stamp for democracy's natural materialistic tendencies. Rather, he observes that the American clergy abandons "a part" of the human heart "to present cares;" it presents the concerns of this life "as important *although secondary objects*," and it endeavors to find the spot where well-being and salvation "touch and are bound to each other" (423, emphasis added). By conceding so much to materialism, religion in democracy has the potential to preserve at least a tiny kernel of spiritualism: "The human heart is vaster than one supposes; it can at

once contain a taste for the goods of the earth and a love of those of Heaven; sometimes it seems to give itself over frantically to one of the two; but it is never long before it thinks of the other" (520).

Because in democracy "it is always the majority that makes one believe" (423), the religious restraints on public opinion which Tocqueville seeks to establish will need to be rooted in public opinion. They will result from the complicated and perhaps uncertain efforts of his political science to control the sovereign power of democracy by making concessions to it and, in effect, becoming a part of it. Here, as in Volume I, Tocqueville pins his hopes on finding a means to convince the majority to exercise its omnipotent power in a beneficent and self-restricting way. Throughout *Democracy in America*, he seeks to persuade democrats of the need for such limitations by speaking to them of the need for an enlightened selfishness—a kind of selfishness which, paradoxically, calls not for the straightforward and rational pursuit of one's own well-being, but instead for a set of small but allegedly necessary sacrifices whose ultimate payoff is to be found only in an uncertain future. Indeed, many if not all of the practical recommendations for democracy's improvement which he makes throughout the work rest on the inculcation of this kind of thinking,[195] and although his analysis of its applications to specific problems are scattered among both volumes, his most explicit theoretical treatment of the idea that underlies each of them is found in his discussion of the "doctrine of self-interest well understood" (501).

[195] For an account of these practical and institutional recommendations, see Zetterbaum 1967, 93-97.

SELF-INTEREST WELL UNDERSTOOD

In the introduction to *Democracy in America* Tocqueville had spoken of a "science" of self-interest, and he had juxtaposed that science—which he bemoaned as lacking among the Europeans of his time—to the lack of enlightenment which characterized the religious beliefs typical of aristocratic ages (10). In Volume II, by contrast, he strikes a different tone. In his thematic discussion of interest well understood, he always refers to this idea as a "doctrine," never as a science, and he praises the aid which religion can give to it. He underscores that when he speaks of religion he is referring to a set of purely "dogmatic beliefs," and he emphasizes not only that all human beings require such dogmas, but that, precisely because of the answers which they provide to the most important human questions—answers which make clear the "duties" which men have to God and to one another—religious beliefs should be considered "the most desirable" dogmas in all centuries (417). But Tocqueville also stresses in his discussion of the Americans' philosophic method how resistant they are to accepting dogmatic beliefs—or to admitting to themselves that they accept them—and he accordingly praises American preachers, as we have just seen, for advertising the spot where the demands of religion and those of rational or this-worldly selfishness happen to coincide (423). His recommendations therefore seem to be marked by a certain ambiguity: sometimes he appears to speak as a defender of reason and enlightened self-interest, at other times he comes across as a proponent of dogma and sacrifice. Indeed, if this ambiguity permeates Tocqueville's work as a whole, it is especially present in his explicit treatment of the doctrine of interest well-understood—and this appears to be

especially important because this discussion is not limited to an analysis of moral thinking in democracies, but it instead considers the latter in light of the tensions that pervade our moral psychology as a whole. Tocqueville draws attention to these tensions first and foremost by dividing his analysis of self interest well-understood into two chapters, the first of which contains no mention of religion at all and the second of which is exclusively devoted to a discussion of it (500, 504). The structure of his analysis thus reflects what he suggests is the natural relationship between morality and religion, a relationship that both reflects the depth of the hopes which human beings place in morality and also signals the ultimate tendency of those hopes to be disappointed. For, as Tocqueville will make clear in this section, while human beings tend to regard morality first and foremost as something that can subsist on its own, their conception of it as something resplendent and lofty also entails the idea that it is beneficial, and they therefore look to religion to provide a secondary but nonetheless absolutely essential sanction for it.

Tocqueville begins the first of these chapters with the following declaration: "When the world was led by a few powerful and wealthy individuals, these liked to form for themselves a sublime idea of the duties of man; they were pleased to profess that it is glorious to forget oneself and that it is fitting to do good without self-interest like God himself. This was the official doctrine of the time in the matter of morality" (500). In aristocratic ages, according to Tocqueville, those who were most serious about morality believed that their actions were undertaken without any consideration for their own benefit. They believed that this disinterestedness made their souls beautiful and sublime

and deserving of glory, and they found that conception of nobility reflected in a selfless God whose omnipotence was equal to His justice. But, as we mentioned previously in our discussion of Tocqueville's introduction, this grand and noble conception of morality is also highly problematic. Insofar as this notion of divine selflessness is at the root of a conception of human excellence—of a glorious and sublime existence which renders one better in soul and which it "pleases" one to possess—it is not clear how virtue thus understood can plausibly claim to be disinterested and thus also worthy of this excellence or glory or sublimity of soul. Indeed, that this idea was the "official doctrine" of the times leads one to suspect that hypocrisy under aristocracy ought to have been fairly common, and Tocqueville claims to doubt "that men were more virtuous in aristocratic centuries than in others" (500-1). What distinguished those centuries was that "the beauties of virtue were constantly spoken of," but while this was going on men also studied the utility of virtue "in secret" (501). Men were not more virtuous in aristocratic times than they are now, in other words, because they can never be completely disinterested. Human beings will always look for sacrifice to yield some recompense, the only question is where that recompense will be found.

Whereas aristocratic peoples found their reward for virtue in an idea of sublime and divine glory which was considered part and parcel with virtue itself—and which therefore greatly obscured the innate hope for this reward—in democratic ages "the imagination takes a less lofty flight."

> [As] each man concentrates on himself, moralists become frightened at this idea of sacrifice and they no longer dare to offer it to the human mind; therefore they are reduced to inquiring whether the individual advantage of citizens would not be to work for the happiness of all, and when they have discovered one of the points

> where particular interest happens to meet the general interest and to be confounded with it, they hasten to bring it to light; little by little such observations are multiplied. What was only an isolated remark becomes a general doctrine, and one finally believes one perceives that man, in serving those like him, serves himself, and that his particular interest is to do good (501).

Now, that Tocqueville, who has already claimed that there are no permanently valid general ideas, continually refers to self-interest well understood as a "doctrine" suggests, as this passage seems to imply, that as a principle it is not true. At the end of this chapter, he admits with classic understatement that he does not "believe that the doctrine of self-interest such as it is preached in America is evident in all its parts," but he nevertheless calls upon "the moralists of our day" to do their utmost to promote it, even "should they judge it imperfect" (503). Thus, in accordance with his own advice, he refers to this doctrine as a teaching of "enlightened" selfishness (or egoism [*égoïsme*]) even though, strictly speaking, it is not. For, to repeat, although there are a "great number" of times when their reasoning makes sense (503), the Americans who claim to sacrifice to the common good because they are confident of receiving a long-term payoff also frequently judge wrongly. If they were truly clear-sighted about their individual interests, they would pursue these exclusively, and if they did not disregard the common good entirely, they would at least rationalize that the latter is somehow served through the unbridled exercise of private selfishness.

But this is not what self-interest well understood calls upon men to do. Unlike truly enlightened egoism, which "withers the seed of all the virtues" (483), self-interest well understood uses the vague promise of long-term benefit to persuade man "that one must sacrifice oneself" for the common good in the short run (501). In fact, as the title of

this chapter suggests, Tocqueville finds this doctrine useful for its capacity to serve as a counterweight to individualism, which, in his analysis, threatens eventually to turn into pure egoism and therewith to a forgetting of the very idea virtue, private as well as public (483). Self-interest well understood should therefore not be confused with "Mandeville's maxim that private vices lead to public benefits;"[196] it teaches men not "that the useful is never dishonest" but instead that "honesty can be useful" (503). Although the doctrine of interest shares common ground with economists who claim that the sacrifice of immediate short term pleasures is rational because it is likely to lead to long-term benefits, it opposes those proponents of the free market who claim that each's pursuit of his own well-being ensures that of the collective—it is unequivocally hostile to the idea that greed is good. Tocqueville writes that this latter idea is the "only" teaching that he finds "every day" in the mouths of his European contemporaries, and he says that there is no telling "what stupid excess their selfishness" will eventually be brought to and what "shameful miseries" will eventually result from this (503). Tocqueville therefore recommends the doctrine of self-interest well understood as a remedy for this condition, and he observes how its widespread presence in America has, quite paradoxically, permitted those who espouse it to act on "the disinterested and unreflective sparks that are natural to man" (502).[197]

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[196] Zetterbaum 1967, 103. For Spinoza's influence on Mandeville, see Israel 2000, 111.

[197] A number of Tocqueville scholars tend to take the doctrine of self-interest well understood as a teaching about interest in the narrow sense. Winthrop, for example, equates it with the idea that "whatever is useful must be good" (rather than the reverse), and argues that it has the potential to exacerbate (rather than restrain) individualism and thus lead to despotism (1993, 214). Her analysis presents Tocqueville's discussion of this doctrine more as a description of democratic moral thinking than as a lesson about how to change it. In a similar fashion, Koritansky is wholly silent on Tocqueville's strong recommendation that this doctrine be taught to democratic publics (see 1986, 117). Anastaplo (1991) and Zetterbaum (1967,

Tocqueville says that the doctrine of interest well understood has been created and propagated by an anonymous set of American "moralists" who "have perceived that in their country and their time" man has "been led back toward himself by an irresistible force." Because they have lost "hope of stopping him," they no longer dream "of doing more than guiding him," and so they now concede the legitimacy of the pursuit of interest, "but they do their best to prove that the interest of each is to be honest" (501). These moralists, in other words, remain moralists in the strict sense of the term. Far from mere apologists for democracy's natural instincts, as Tocqueville presents them they appear to be quasi-independent observers who, like Tocqueville himself, are concerned with instilling the idea of virtue in men—at least as far as circumstances will permit. They have become "frightened" at the idea of sacrifice largely because their "less lofty" audience no longer accepts the "sublime" idea of self-overcoming that was present under aristocracy (500-1). Having recognized that democrats can be counted on to take their bearings by reason and self-interest rather than by admiration for a God who does good for its own sake, they have recognized the need to alter their message accordingly. In so doing, according to Tocqueville, they have been tremendously successful, for "they have convinced their fellow citizens" (501) that it is always beneficial to oneself in the long-term to make temporary sacrifices for the common good.

By emphasizing the utilitarian and advantageous side of virtue rather than its resplendent, sublime, and sacrificial dimension, Tocqueville's anonymous American

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102ff.), on the other hand, both acknowledge this, but they interpret his advice as a wholehearted endorsement of the rationalistic and self-interested thinking which the Enlightenment sought to instill. For

moralists have found a way of turning "personal interest against itself" (502). In other words, by creating a "doctrine" that appeals to the rationalistic and materialistic instincts of democrats, they have effectually duped their audience into acting on the unreflective instinct for self-sacrifice that is "natural to man" and that formed a part—but only a part—of aristocratic morality. As Tocqueville presents it, self-interest well understood therefore functions as a kind of noble lie which presides over the moral thinking of the American polity, and this can be seen in the way that the Americans create the most elaborate and far-fetched accounts of how their acts of self-forgetting are really ultimately self-interested. They "complacently" explain how their enlightened love of themselves leads them "to sacrifice a part of their time and their wealth" to the common good, but in this "they do not do themselves justice": "they would rather do honor to their philosophy than to themselves" (502).

But while interest well understood therefore appears to be a myth whose power arises from the concessions which it makes to American rationalism, in order to be believable its mythical character must necessarily be obscured, which means that the connection between sacrifice and reward which it advertises must also be plainly discernable, at least in the vast majority of cases. This is why Tocqueville claims that the tenets of self-interest well understood are often true (503), for where citizens are called upon only to sacrifice "a part" of their time and their wealth for the sake of the whole, selflessness will be less demanding and the resulting payoff will be clearer. This doctrine therefore cannot recover the truly grand acts of self-overcoming that aristocracies

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a more Christian interpretation of this doctrine (which also differs somewhat from the one offered here),

occasionally put on display, but it can inculcate a set of un-extraordinary but solid and dignified middle-class virtues. It "does not produce great devotions; but it suggests little sacrifices each day; by itself it cannot make a man virtuous; but it forms a multitude of citizens who are regulated, temperate, moderate, farsighted," and "masters of themselves" (502). And yet, Tocqueville never denies that these small sacrifices are sacrifices. The constituent elements in democratic moral psychology are therefore the same as in aristocratic thinking, but their priority has been reversed. In aristocracy the sacrificial element of virtue was advertised by all while the hope that it would bring a benefit was unrecognized by most and studied only by a few. In America, by contrast, the idea that virtue entails a payoff is touted by all, and while its sacrificial element remains present, it appears to be entirely unrecognized (except perhaps for readers of Tocqueville). Among the Americans, the distinctly human confusion which is part and parcel with the notion of virtue is preserved, and this is why Tocqueville claims that, while self-interest well understood "perhaps prevents some men from mounting far above the ordinary level of humanity," it does an admirable job of keeping many others there who would otherwise fall below it (502). Because it prevents men from becoming simple rational calculators of their own benefit, it maintains in their souls a certain version of those tension-ridden sentiments that only human beings possess, and it accordingly prevents them from brutalizing themselves.

One of the most common criticisms of Tocqueville by contemporary scholars concerns his apparent support for "religious functionalism." By encouraging future

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see Mitchell 1995, 189-90.

democratic citizens to look favorably upon religion for its social benefits, this view alleges, Tocqueville inadvertently undermines the only truly solid basis that religious beliefs can have: the conviction in the minds of the people as to their truth.[198] But while Tocqueville acknowledges that the Americans consider religion from the perspective of utility, and while he therefore invites the reader to surmise that they also share his "purely human point of view," he does not say the same about the doctrine of self-interest well understood. Of this doctrine, he indicates, the Americans are all true believers (501). By catering to the Americans' belief in their own rationality, in their intellectual independence and clear-sighted pursuit of their own advantage, this pseudo-rational myth has re-instilled in them a necessary mental fog that has permitted them to engage in small but nonetheless substantial acts of self-sacrifice. And yet, because this is a fog, and because the idea of virtue to which it leads requires a belief in both sacrifice and reward, its presence will necessarily entail the continued existence of the kind of religious hope which Tocqueville says is "natural to the human heart" (284). After all, "there are a great number of sacrifices that can find their recompense only in the other world," and so it is both necessary and desirable for religious beliefs to complement the doctrine of interest well understood (504). In the case of the Americans, as Tocqueville makes clear, these religious convictions may be a pale shadow of what they were under aristocracy, and the otherworldly hopes which they entail may be only dimly recognized by those who hold them, but Tocqueville indicates that self-interest well understood can help them to survive, if only in a weakened or inchoate form.

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[198] See, for example, Lively 1962, 196-9; Manent 1996, 90ff.; Zetterbaum 1967, 119-22.

According to Tocqueville, the "founders of almost all religions" have taught something which is really not qualifiedly different from the lessons of those "philosophers" who have espoused the doctrine of self-interest well understood. While the latter have sought to convince men that "one must constantly triumph over oneself to serve oneself better," the former have done the same—they "have only moved the goal back" by placing it in the next life (504). Insofar as self-interest well understood teaches men that virtue will ultimately be beneficial for the virtuous person, it reflects the natural human hope for recompense, and the inability to rest satisfied with a complete self-abnegation, that is present in all moral thinking, be it religious or secular, democratic or aristocratic. But although the founders of almost all religions have made their doctrines popular by making virtue the "best bargain," in Locke's phrase, Tocqueville also suggests that they tapped into something which transcends this kind of self-interested thinking: "I refuse to believe that all those who practice virtue out of a spirit of religion act *only* in view of recompense" (504, emphasis added). Although recompense might be a part of what drives human beings towards religious beliefs, these beliefs can never be that mercenary. As Tocqueville states, those "zealous Christians" who proclaim that they only do good to be rewarded in heaven in fact "deceive themselves. I respect them too much to believe them."

> It is true that Christianity tells us that one must prefer others to oneself to gain Heaven; but Christianity tells us as well that one ought to do good to those like oneself out of love of God. That is a magnificent expression; man penetrates Divine thought by his intelligence; he sees that the goal of God is order; he freely associates himself with that great design; and all the while sacrificing his particular interests to the admirable order of all things, he expects no other recompense than the pleasure of contemplating it (504-5).

As Tocqueville describes it, interest is not "the sole motive of religious men" (505). He never, however, denies that it *is* an important motive. In his psychology, humans are drawn to religion both by a sublime and poetic feeling of forgetting oneself and being one with God, and by a desire to affirm themselves and to live forever. Neither of these by itself would be humanly acceptable. The thought of someone who goes to heaven only because he desires a reward is as unpalatable as the thought of someone who does good all his life but is punished nonetheless. Interest is therefore not the sole motive for religious belief, but it is "the principal means religions themselves make use of to guide men, and I do not doubt that it is only from this side that they take hold of the crowd and become popular" (505).

It is in the light of this statement—which applies to aristocratic as well as democratic religion—that one should consider Tocqueville's declaration that this method is particularly prominent in the United States. Just as religion made use of the promise of reward to gain the crowd in former centuries, moralists today must make use of a similar logic to establish their influence at a time when the people rule. Thus, Tocqueville presents the Americans as cold calculators who turn to religious beliefs because they have internalized a very watered down version of 'Pascal's wager,' and he says that "it seems to be reason much more than the heart that leads them to the foot of the altar" (505). Moreover, "Not only do Americans follow their religion out of interest, but they often place in this world the interest that one can have in following it" (505). The stress on reason and self-interest that characterizes American religion naturally inclines the faithful to look only for those certain and tangible rewards which their "philosophic

method" instructs them to take seriously. Thus, "only with great trouble" can American preachers make the faithful look to heaven rather than earth, and to "touch their listeners better" they constantly stress the temporal and utilitarian benefits which belief provides (505). But that these preachers can direct attention to the other world "only with great trouble" suggests that they still can do this, albeit on extremely rare occasions. By saying that they speak almost exclusively of this world to "touch their listeners better," Tocqueville thus suggests that these preachers have followed his own advice: by conceding a great deal to democratic materialism, they have preserved at least the bare possibility of spiritualism. When listening to them, it is "*difficult* to know . . . if the principle object of religion is to procure felicity in the other world or well-being in this one" (506, emphasis added). It is not completely certain that religion in America serves only the latter, and this ambiguity is crucial for the preservation of some residual spiritual longings. A vague and perhaps unrecognized hope for another world may yet remain in the background. Religion has not become simply a sanction for democracy's natural instincts.

According to Tocqueville, then, both aristocratic and democratic religions ground their appeals on arguments from self-interest, but the main difference between them is the tendency of the latter to conceive of this interest in a more prosaic light. Unlike the feudal aristocrat, who had undertaken monumental sacrifices out of a tremendously grandiose vision of self-affirmation—or even the medieval peasant, who had endured a miserable life in the expectation that there would be a better one to come—the American democrat as Tocqueville describes him combines a multitude of small sacrifices with a

hope for petty, largely material gains. His acts of self-overcoming are less costly and less impressive than those of his aristocratic forbearers, and his vision of the reward that can be attained thereby is consequently also less grand. The morality which he puts on display is thereby less impressive and less admirable, but it still arises from the same confused sentiment that renders such action uniquely human and which therefore makes ambitions which strive for immaterial things possible. Indeed, because it remains the case that not every sacrifice yields an obvious recompense, the religion of the Americans can only remain mostly, but never entirely, this-worldly. Their hope that piety will bring a temporal reward may yet reflect a dim hope for something beyond this life, and even if it is seldom glimpsed, that hope should also preserve a modicum of the idea that virtue or devotion has an inherent dignity of its own. To be clear, Tocqueville does not suggest that anything close to aristocratic greatness will be possible in the democratic future. In fact, it appears that his most important aspiration is to preserve the bare minimum of what is truly distinctive of humanity. But his extremely sober suggestion would seem to be that a certain lowering of horizons and dimming of passion is simply inevitable—the only question is to what extent this can be mitigated. His foremost task is not to recover what is permanently lost but instead to preserve those aspects of human greatness which democracy is not forced to destroy.

PHILOSOPHY AND THE FUTURE OF DEMOCRACY

Tocqueville's comments about the contemplative pleasure that accompanies the disinterested side of human religious longings (505) recalls his characterization of the Puritans' devotion as an attempt to fulfill a "purely intellectual need" (32). Although the Puritans themselves might have resisted this interpretation of their divine mission, Tocqueville associates the desire for self-forgetting which they exhibited with the penetration of "Divine thought" by human intelligence (504), and he thus suggests that there is a certain kinship between the cultivation of man's religious longings and the fulfillment of his intellectual potential. Indeed, the sole example he provides of what he apparently regards as the peak of the theoretical life—and the figure who arguably receives the greatest praise from Tocqueville in the entire book—is not a self-absorbed rationalist like Spinoza but Pascal. Pascal, according to Tocqueville, lived under an aristocracy that could "facilitate the natural spark of the mind toward the highest regions of thought." He therefore exhibited "a sublime and almost divine love of truth" (436) which is reminiscent of the "sublime idea of the duties of man" that characterized the official moral thinking of aristocratic times (500). His love of truth appears to be the most intense instantiation of the erotic devotion that characterized the political and martial virtues of the feudal aristocrats, and as Tocqueville presents him, he appears to pursue an immaterial good that is purer, loftier, and less susceptible to the charge of hypocrisy than the glory which they typically sought to attain.

According to Tocqueville, Pascal's life was characterized by a "pure desire to know" that was unmixed with any concern for glory, for material well-being or the goods

of the body, or even for the preservation of life itself. His was "an ardent and inexhaustible love of truth that nourishes itself and enjoys itself incessantly without being able to satisfy itself" (435). This "ardent, haughty [or proud], and disinterested passion" for "abstract sources of truth" and "mother ideas" (435) is all-consuming, and Tocqueville claims that it is ultimately "sterile" (438)—perhaps because, like all erotic longings, it grows while it is being satisfied and therefore can never lead to the attainment of the ultimate felicity which it promises. Pascal's overwhelming passion "to discover the most hidden secrets of the Creator" (435) therefore led him literally to destroy himself. It caused him "to tear his soul in a way from the midst of the cares of life" and to break "the bonds that hold it to the body, so as to die of old age before forty" (436).[199] Interjecting himself into his description of this extraordinary man, Tocqueville writes that upon considering such a phenomenon "I halt in bewilderment and understand that it is no ordinary cause that can produce such extraordinary efforts" (436).

With this succinct statement, Tocqueville briefly and enigmatically conveys a sense of the experience of understanding which he underwent upon contemplating Pascal's extraordinary example. He draws attention to the bewilderment or the wonder that he experienced upon witnessing, so to speak, the clearest and most representative manifestation of the human possibility that is the pious life. In so doing, however, Tocqueville also subtly reminds the reader that he is not Pascal, for to contemplate the

[199] Lawler helpfully notes that Tocqueville's account of Pascal's self-destruction implies a quiet critique of the latter's zealous—not to say fanatical—quest for truth. While Lawler is correct to point out that Tocqueville never suggests that "Pascal's 'quest' was successful," as we will shortly make clear he almost certainly goes too far when he intimates that Pascal self-destructed because the quest for truth, in Tocqueville's estimation, is ultimately "futile" (1993, 79).

phenomenon of piety in its purest form and to reflect that it can be the product of "no ordinary cause" is not necessarily to be pious oneself.[200] Indeed, Pascal as Tocqueville describes him never reflects on the roots of his own "extraordinary efforts," and while Tocqueville claims that "no ordinary cause" can produce them, he never says that such a cause cannot be identified. Indeed, the account of erotic longing which he provides throughout *Democracy in America* would seem to provide the explanation of just such a cause, and Tocqueville may very well be suggesting in this passage that he came to an understanding of the nature of *eros* by studying the religiosity of people like Pascal.

In a brief but pregnant passage in Volume I, Tocqueville appears to announce his fundamental disagreement with this "great man."

> A great man has said that *ignorance is at both ends of science*. Perhaps it would have been truer to say that profound convictions are found only at both ends and that in the middle is doubt. One can in fact consider human intelligence in three distinct and often successive states.
>
> Man believes firmly because he adopts without going deeply. He doubts when objections are presented. Often he comes to resolve all his doubts, and then he begins to believe again. This time he no longer seizes the truth haphazardly and in the shadows, but he sees it face to face and advances directly into its light (179, emphasis original).

As the context of this reference to the *Pensées* makes clear, when Pascal claims that ignorance is at both ends of science, he means that human reason at its peak can only come to recognize its own incapacity. After overcoming "the pure natural ignorance in

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[200] As Manent writes, "To recognize the genius (in the full sense of the term) of Pascal surely does not require us to agree that he is right. It is to feel the necessity of seriously entertaining the possibility of one's own conversion, and thus, eventually, seriously to spell out reasons why, once thoroughly thought through, one does not convert" (1996, 77). Lawler, on the other hand, does not consider Tocqueville to be a believer, but he does not consider his lack of faith to be based on this kind of dialectical ascent. Rather, he writes that Tocqueville was simply "not fortunate enough" to have had religious faith. As a result, he exhibited the miserable "mixture of pride and anxiety which is the human . . . condition" (1993, 92) as it presents itself according to nature or in the absence of revelation.

which all men find themselves at birth," most ordinary men arrive at "vain knowledge" and pretended wisdom. The "great intellects," on the other hand, "find they know nothing." Having "run through all that men can know," they come at last to "a learned ignorance which is conscious of itself" (Pascal 1941, 110-11).[201] Although this characterization of the weakness of human wisdom might appear similar to a description of a Socratic "knowledge of ignorance," the two could not be more distant—in fact, they are as distinct as ignorance and knowledge themselves. An "ignorance which is conscious of itself" entails a recognition of the ultimate incapacity of the human mind, it is first and foremost a claim about what we cannot know. "Knowledge of ignorance," by contrast, can be attained only if the mind is capable of engaging in real introspection, and the doubts which it encounters as a result of these efforts pave the way, as Tocqueville indicates, for the achievement of a limited but nonetheless substantial certainty.

Whereas Pascal insists that the human mind at its peak can do no more than recognize that it will always be trapped in darkness, Tocqueville, perhaps borrowing that most famous of all Platonic metaphors, insists that a few human beings will be able to escape from the shadows of truth and advance "directly into its light" (179). While the vast majority require dogmatic beliefs to give them a sense of their moral duties, and to provide a kind of anchor for their intellects, the limitations on human knowledge which this thought implies are practical rather than theoretical. Because of the limitations of leisure and ability that will always be encountered in most men, it is "difficult for each person, left to himself, to come to fix his ideas solely by the effort of his reason," but that

[201] This reference is to fragment #327 in the Brunschvig ordering, which this edition follows.

is not to say that such a thing is impossible for a few. Indeed, "minds very free of the ordinary preoccupations of life, very penetrating, very agile, very practiced, can, with the aid of much time and care, break through to these so necessary truths" (417).[202]

Now, to be sure, Tocqueville also insists that even the wisest of human beings must necessarily take the vast majority of their opinions on the basis of trust.

> This is not only necessary; but desirable. A man who would undertake to examine everything by himself could accord but little time and attention to each thing; this work would keep his mind in a perpetual agitation that would prevent him from penetrating any truth deeply and from settling solidly on any certitude. His intellect would be at the same time independent and feeble. It is therefore necessary that he make a choice among the various objects of human opinions and that he adopt many beliefs without discussing them *in order better to fathom a few he has reserved for examination* (408, emphasis added).

As Tocqueville thus suggests, the acceptance of opinions on the basis of trust—and perhaps also the consciousness that these opinions are mere opinions—is the necessary first step in a process that can ultimately lead to genuine knowledge. This knowledge, as Tocqueville asserts both here and in his implicit critique of Pascal's position, will be gained not through an observation of non-human nature but instead through an introspective examination of a few human opinions—an examination that will likely judge the latter in the light of other, unexamined beliefs, and which will therefore reveal whether the two can be coherently held at the same time. He appears to suggest that this process reveals the natural limitations of the human mind, but also that it indicates the solid character of what we can know after all. Referring to those few who can "break

[202] Lawler thus appears to err when he claims that Tocqueville "shared Nietzsche's view that 'Socrates and his school' were in part cleverly deceptive and in part self-deceptive" (1993, 96). Tocqueville clearly does not regard Pascal "as the most perfect of men," as Bloom suggests (1987, 251), but his critique of him is

through" to those "so necessary truths" about God, the soul, and human duties, Tocqueville writes:

> Still we see that these philosophers themselves are almost always surrounded by uncertainties; that at each step the natural light that enlightens them is obscured and threatens to be extinguished, and that despite all their efforts, they still have been able to discover only a few contradictory notions, in the midst of which the human mind has constantly floated for thousands of years without being able to seize the truth firmly or even to find new errors (417).

It is precisely their awareness of these contradictions, Tocqueville suggests, which distinguishes philosophers from non-philosophers. Their knowledge of the world is limited to the realm of the human, but the wisdom which they can gain after resigning themselves to that limitation is nonetheless substantial. By recognizing the character of the "few contradictory notions" which have always and will always characterize the human mind, the philosopher as Tocqueville understands him can undergo a dialectical ascent from common opinion to something superior—he can come, in Tocqueville's famous phrase, to see "not differently, but further than the parties" (15). This is an ascent which Tocqueville seems to have undergone upon contemplating the kind of life that Pascal represents, and it is one which he points the reader to when he provides such a vivid description of the tension-ridden but also beautiful character of the longing for immortality (283-4), as well as when he articulates the "sublime" but deeply confused passion for glory which characterized aristocratic morality and aristocratic piety (500, 504-5). This may be why Tocqueville confidently claims that religion is rooted in "human nature," and why he insists that his "purely human point of view" (284) is

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surely not that he led "too theoretical a life" (Lawler 1993, 93). On the contrary, Tocqueville indicates that Pascal was not introspective or theoretical enough.

sufficient to establish that religion is "natural to man" (278)—which may be meant to imply that it is not divine. At the very least, he asserts that this process of ascent from common opinion can lead to an authentic spiritual liberation. The limitation of inquiry to the examination of a few human opinions, he writes, "is a salutary servitude" that permits man "to make good use of his freedom" (408).[203]

Once this is recognized, it becomes apparent that the kinship between the theoretical life and the religious life can be envisioned from a political standpoint as well. Because Tocqueville could only come to attain the kind of understanding he possessed by thinking through the contradictions which are inherent in Pascal's outlook, it follows that his very existence as a philosopher is, in a way, dependent on that of men like Pascal. His attempts to keep religion alive in modern times, and to resist the easing of tensions that democracy threatens to bring about, can therefore be read in the light of his professed concern for "the destiny of those like me" (672). Where souls are flat and unconfused variety will cease to exist, and the great alternatives that have always characterized human life will disappear. Human beings will no longer be able to choose between a life of piety, of honor, or of wisdom, to name a few, and where that choice is absent the great task of judging among these alternatives which has characterized political philosophy

[203] While these brief comments may not be enough on their own to establish Tocqueville's status as a thinker of the first rank, they should at least give us pause before jumping to the conclusion that he is not. Catherine Zuckert, for example, seems to speak too hastily when she says that Tocqueville's political science "does not provide an adequate account of its own philosophic foundation" (1991, 131). Her contention that Tocqueville never provides "an example of the ability of the mind to rise above its historical circumstances" (ibid., 151) is contradicted not only by his discussion of Pascal (whose achievement was made possible by "no ordinary cause," including social state), but also by the account that he gives of his own activity, which allows him to rise above the quarrel between the democratic and aristocratic "parties." Moreover, the bulk of Volume II is devoted to a juxtaposition of these two great historical possibilities. Cf. Manent 2006, 120.

since the time of Socrates will also cease to exist. By keeping these alternatives alive in democratic society by encouraging religious belief, and by safeguarding the memory of the political alternative that is aristocracy through his writing, Tocqueville's political science seeks to preserve and continue this great tradition.

Conclusion: Tocqueville's Political Science Today

"It is natural to believe that what most satisfies the regard of this creator and preserver of men is not the singular prosperity of some, but the greatest well-being of all: what seems to me decadence is therefore progress in his eyes; what wounds me is agreeable to him. Equality is perhaps less elevated; but it is more just, and its justice makes for its greatness and its beauty."
-Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, p. 674-75

It would perhaps be easy to come away from Tocqueville's analysis with the impression that democracy, even at its best, is something that simply comes at too high a price for friends of human greatness such as himself to accept. After all, the "mother thought" (14) that unites the disparate parts and diverse topics of his book would seem to consist not in a certain political lesson but rather in a *problem*: the insuperable tension that exists between justice—understood in the contemporary, egalitarian sense of the term—and human greatness. But even though Tocqueville continually trumpets the justice of democracy throughout this work, because he also calls attention quite explicitly to its tendency to instill mediocrity and to stifle the potential of the most outstanding human beings, there is also a very real sense in which his analysis reveals it to be a force for injustice. Thus, one prominent study of *Democracy in America* ends by declaring that despite his best efforts "Tocqueville cannot help but bring us to question the desirability of democracy itself" (Koritansky 1986, 148).

Now, to be sure, almost every page of Tocqueville's writing is permeated by a deep sense of loss. His portrayal of aristocracy conveys an elegiac description of a way of life that was marked by poetry, by beauty, and by grandeur. This description is bound

to be moving to those who, unlike contemporary historians, would prefer to study only the higher classes of the old societies, and thereby to see in them only the wealth, the grace, and the learning of the aristocracy, rather than the poverty, the coarseness, and the ignorance of the people. But even though Tocqueville in the work's last chapter says that this too would be his choice (674), he has provided enough revelations of the depravity and the inhumanity of aristocracy to indicate that this is not and cannot be his final verdict on the matter (cf. e.g. 535-9). Because Tocqueville writes as someone who endeavors to see "not differently, but further than the parties" (15), he is neither a democrat nor an aristocrat. He sees through and beyond each of the two "great parties" (170) which divide all free societies—that is, all societies in which the final victory of either the people or the great has not eradicated all human vitality and all politics properly so-called. Indeed, in Volume II Tocqueville presents an extended comparison of these two great historical alternatives. By setting up what is in essence a dialogue between the ways of life and conceptions of justice characteristic of democracy and aristocracy, he preserves the memory of the latter in a time when it is both most necessary and most at risk of being forgotten. In so doing, he allows his most careful readers to see the faults and the merits of each, and he allows future political scientists following his own example to arbitrate between them.

Knowingly or unknowingly, then, Tocqueville in this respect writes in a way that is reminiscent of the political science of Aristotle. His analysis is permeated by a sober awareness of the limitations of politics and of the inevitable failures that will accompany all attempts to create a society that is free of injustice. Tocqueville's realism teaches that

an aristocracy which produces greatness at the price of inequality and injustice exposes that greatness to a real moral challenge, but it also teaches that a democracy which achieves justice at the expense of greatness thereby commits a very real and very unjust kind of tyranny. Since no polity can be without faults, Tocqueville's strategy is one of moderation and of balance. He indicates that if he had lived in a former age, he would have called attention to the material and physical sentiments that democratic citizens today are much too enamored of, for by instilling a concern in the aristocratic class for physical security and material well-being, he would have tried to encourage it to treat the people with more humanity. But in modernity the task is different. Now it is not prosperity and security but human excellence that is threatened, and that is why much of *Democracy in America* is dedicated to persuading the "sovereigns in our time" to turn their attention not to making "great things" but instead to making "great men" (672). By preserving residues of aristocracy within democracy, Tocqueville's political science seeks to provide the tools to do this. But of course, these tools will be useless if these sovereigns themselves—and with them, the elite, former aristocratic classes of society—will not accept them. It is therefore to convince those elites to come over to democracy's side that Tocqueville presents his most emphatic arguments for its greatness.

Democracy in America is addressed in large part to an audience which is disillusioned with democracy, and this, perhaps more so than anything else, serves to make this work particularly appropriate for readers in our own time. For the disillusioned readers whom Tocqueville addresses include not only partisans of aristocratic revival—of which our time has of course seen its share—but also ordinary democrats who are

plagued by self-despair and self-hatred. Tocqueville's work begins from the recognition, which permeates across the political spectrum today, that the high hopes of the Enlightenment have not been realized. His analysis indicates that those hopes were bound to be disappointed because they rested on a flawed understanding of human psychology—an understanding that failed to do justice to humanity's deepest longings. Believing that human beings are or can be made largely at home in this world, or that religion need root itself only in the more or less mercenary concern for benefit or personal utility, the theological reforms of Locke and Spinoza backfired in ways which these thinkers did not anticipate. Because they failed to understand that pride is rooted in a desire for some kind of self-overcoming and service to others, and therefore also in a desire to be worthy or deserving of some excellence, they laid the basis for a society made up largely of isolated and calculating individuals—individuals who recognized their own ignobility in this respect, and who therefore despised themselves accordingly. Moreover, according to Tocqueville, the Enlightenment's failure to appreciate this most fundamental desire of the human soul also necessarily left this desire uncontrolled and undirected, and it therefore risked allowing pride or the longing for immortality to resurface in wild, unmoderated, and pernicious forms. The Tocquevillian dichotomy between "a natural disgust for existence and an immense desire to exist" (284) has manifested itself in his time and our own as the spread of lethargic despair, on the one hand, and the awakening of new and dangerous spiritual longings, on the other.

The failings of contemporary liberal theory which we detailed in chapters one and two provide a disturbing illustration that we continue to be faced with these same twin

problems. The incapacity of contemporary theorists to find an adequate grounding for democracy's deepest moral claims reflects a widespread lack of self-confidence in democracy's ultimate meaning and spiritual purpose. To be sure, Americans today continue to muddle through, and liberalism acts as a more than adequate *modus vivendi*. But as Tocqueville warns, the preservation of a healthy republican polity, and indeed, of liberalism in the authentic sense of the term, requires more than this. A peaceful society cannot remain a free society if it is populated by "pusillanimous and soft citizens" (672). The preservation of freedom requires an energetic citizenry animated by a "watchful and combative fear" (673), a citizenry which is thereby willing to fight and to make great sacrifices to defend its way of life. For this, liberal-democracy requires the attachment of citizens at a deep spiritual level, and Rawls' anti-foundationalist liberalism, which apologizes for the grudgingly conceded need to defend that way of life, obviously cannot provide this. In a similar way, as Tocqueville showed in Volume I, a Christian liberalism which makes religion into a mirror-image of democracy is most likely to facilitate, rather than to restrain, its most spiritually damaging tendencies. But Kraynak's aristocratic revival, on the other hand, would seem to present the opposite danger. Tocqueville's warning to the aristocrats and the reactionaries of his day was that liberal-democracy, despite its great spiritual drawbacks, is the only viable option for modern times other than despotism. That attempts in the twentieth century to produce an aristocratic re-awakening produced only unprecedented nightmares would seem to confirm the soundness of this advice, and it is a lesson which today's less than friendly critics of liberalism would do well to heed.

The two dangers which Tocqueville foresees for the democratic age can be said to be roughly equivalent to the prospects of soft despotism and hard despotism. But because the materialistic and lethargic citizens of a soft despotism are only too likely to enable the rise of a neighboring hard despotism, these should probably be regarded as two aspects of the same overriding problem. To combat it, Tocqueville's political science seeks to cultivate a deep-seated loyalty to liberalism by paying attention to the nature of human pride and to the character of man's spiritual longings. For members of the self-despising democratic citizenry, this entails the careful cultivation of *eros* through the encouragement of religious belief, and the initiation of grand patriotic projects that can provide a healthy outlet for the desire for self-sacrifice. Now, to be sure, such enterprises will certainly not produce a spiritual life or a devotion to the common good as rich or as resplendent as that which existed under aristocracy, but neither will they produce one which is as fanatical and as zealous as the one which characterized the times in which Locke and Spinoza lived. If Tocqueville's task is successful, his new political science will preserve the goods that democracy can offer, and it will do this by maintaining those healthy tensions in the human soul which his psychology places at the root of all human greatness.

Because it sees the need to take a constant, active hand in political life, Tocqueville's political science rejects the Madisonian view that a healthy liberal polity can subsist on its own by counting on the natural action of ambition counteracting ambition. Rather, Tocqueville insists that if democracy is left to its own devices it will cause ambition to disappear, and so to combat this danger it will need to enlist the help of

an elite which can aid and direct liberalism from behind the scenes. To remain healthy and vibrant, liberalism will require the support of future Tocquevillians, of "philosophers and those who govern" (523)—which in Tocqueville's broad usage would seem to refer to writers, intellectuals, religious leaders, politicians, and other elite shapers of public opinion. To garner the loyalty of such (potentially aristocratic) elites, to cater to their sense of honor and their desire for nobility, and to provide a picture of the kind of spiritual defense of democracy which they might one day profess, Tocqueville in the final chapter of the work describes the beginnings of a civil religion.

Directing his attention to those who would overturn democracy out of a naïve and self-destructive attempt to make the world again into what it once was, Tocqueville offers some of the most forceful words in all of *Democracy in America*. "I am convinced . . . that all those in the centuries we are now entering who try to base freedom on privilege and aristocracy will fail. All those who want to attract authority to a single class and retain it there will fail." Rather, as he declares (in a statement which is almost certainly autobiographical), "All those of our contemporaries who want to create or secure the independence and dignity of those like themselves must . . . show themselves as friends of equality; and the only means worthy of them for showing themselves as such is to be such: the success of their holy enterprise depends on it" (666). Tocqueville's concern to improve democracy, as we have already seen, is founded on a care for the future of those like himself (672)—but by this he seems to refer not just to philosophers, but also to all those who are aristocrats by nature, who have noble souls and generous sentiments. By converting such individuals to the cause of democracy, Tocqueville can also ennoble it by

placing their lofty and self-sacrificial desires in its service. The rhetorical thrust of *Democracy in America* therefore aims to convince this audience that a new kind of greatness can be found by working for the cause of human equality and democratic freedom. Thus, for example, he calls the establishment of a settlement in Africa for freed slaves "a beautiful and great idea [*une belle et grand idée*]" (345), and he salutes the nobility, and the lofty and immaterial purpose that animated the Puritan settlement of New England. It is therefore fitting that he closes his work by doing what he earlier said he could not and would not do. He strives to enter into the "point of view of God," and, considering things from that exalted vantage point, to show how a regime that appears mediocre to him and to his aristocratic audience is actually just, and that its justice therefore "makes for its greatness and its beauty" (675; cf. 419).

By purporting to discover a potential source of human greatness in the cause of equality, Tocqueville seeks to attract to that cause the longings and the ambitions of those who might otherwise oppose it on account of its alleged spiritual emptiness. In so doing, he does a great deal to combat that emptiness, for by giving the great a place within democracy, Tocqueville makes its characteristic equality less extreme, and he thereby preserves those immaterial longings which are part and parcel with hierarchy. Now, as previously noted, those longings will never be as rich or as robust as they were under aristocracy, but they will be spiritual, and that means also that they will be human. Moreover, if this project is successful, the kind of liberal theology which he outlines here will filter down to ordinary citizens, and it will turn their love of equality in a more noble and self-transcending direction. As specified in the final pages of *Democracy in*

America, this theology is not specifically Christian: persecution is not a problem which it sees a need to combat, and it seeks to craft a spiritual faith which can help to preserve those goods which Tocqueville insists that democracy can offer. Tocqueville thus appears to hope that his most attentive readers, the future political scientists whom he hopes to groom, will recognize that although the advantages of aristocracy can never be recovered, a democracy which has not yet reached its logical extreme can furnish some very real advantages, and thus also that it is both possible and necessary to direct society towards their procurement. By articulating this kind of limited yet prudent political science, Tocqueville allows us to join him in seeing not differently, but further than the parties, and he thereby instills a moderation which is altogether necessary for the maintenance of freedom.

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